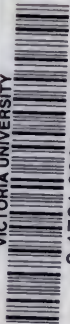




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LONDON: SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE.

A
DARK NIGHT'S WORK

AND OTHER TALES

BY
MRS. GASKELL



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A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

CHAPTER I.

IN the county town of a certain shire there lived (about forty years ago) one Mr. Wilkins, a conveyancing attorney of considerable standing.

The certain shire was but a small county, and the principal town in it contained only about four thousand inhabitants; so in saying that Mr. Wilkins was the principal lawyer in Hamley, I say very little, unless I add that he transacted all the legal business of the gentry for twenty miles round. His grandfather had established the connection; his father had consolidated and strengthened it, and, indeed, by his wise and upright conduct, as well as by his professional skill, had obtained for himself the position of confidential friend to many of the surrounding families of distinction. He visited among them in a way which no mere lawyer had ever done before; dined at their tables—he alone, not accompanied by his wife, be it observed; rode to the meet occasionally as if by accident, although he was as well mounted as any squire among them, and was often persuaded (after a little coquetting about “professional engagements,” and “being wanted at the office”) to have a run with his clients; nay, once or twice he forgot his usual caution, was first in at the death, and rode home with the brush. But in general he knew his place; as his place was held to be in that aristocratic county, and in those days. Nor let it be supposed that he was in any way a toad-eater. He respected himself too much for that. He would give the most unpalatable advice, if need were; would counsel an unsparing reduction of expenditure to an extravagant man; would recommend such an abatement of family pride as paved the way for one or two happy marriages in some instances;

nay, what was the most likely piece of conduct of all to give offence forty years ago, he would speak up for an unjustly-used tenant ; and that with so much temperate and well-timed wisdom and good feeling, that he more than once gained his point. He had one son, Edward. This boy was the secret joy and pride of his father's heart. For himself he was not in the least ambitious, but it did cost him a hard struggle to acknowledge that his own business was too lucrative, and brought in too large an income, to pass away into the hands of a stranger, as it would do if he indulged his ambition for his son by giving him a college education and making him into a barrister. This determination on the more prudent side of the argument took place while Edward was at Eton. The lad had, perhaps, the largest allowance of pocket-money of any boy at school ; and he had always looked forward to going to Christ Church along with his fellows, the sons of the squires, his father's employers. It was a severe mortification to him to find that his destiny was changed, and that he had to return to Hamley to be articled to his father, and to assume the hereditary subservient position to lads whom he had licked in the playground, and beaten at learning.

His father tried to compensate him for the disappointment by every indulgence which money could purchase. Edward's horses were even finer than those of his father ; his literary tastes were kept up and fostered, by his father's permission to form an extensive library, for which purpose a noble room was added to Mr. Wilkins's already extensive house in the suburbs of Hamley. And after his year of legal study in London his father sent him to make the grand tour, with something very like *carte blanche* as to expenditure, to judge from the packages which were sent home from various parts of the Continent.

At last he came home—came back to settle as his father's partner at Hamley. He was a son to be proud of, and right down proud was old Mr. Wilkins of his handsome, accomplished, gentlemanly lad. For Edward was not one to be spoilt by the course of indulgence he had passed through ; at least, if it had done him an injury, the effects were at present hidden from view. He had no vulgar vices ; he was, indeed, rather too refined for the society he was likely to be thrown into, even supposing that society to consist of the highest of his father's employers. He was well read, and an artist of no mean pretensions. Above all, "his heart was in the right place," as his father used to observe.

Nothing could exceed the deference he always showed to him. His mother had long been dead.

I do not know whether it was Edward's own ambition or his proud father's wishes that had led him to attend the Hamley assemblies. I should conjecture the latter, for Edward had of himself too much good taste to wish to intrude into any society. In the opinion of all the shire, no society had more reason to consider itself select than that which met at every full moon in the Hamley assembly-room, an excrescence built on to the principal inn in the town by the joint subscription of all the county families. Into those choice and mysterious precincts no town's person was ever allowed to enter; no professional man might set his foot therein; no infantry officer saw the interior of that ball or that card room. The old original subscribers would fain have had a man prove his sixteen quarterings before he might make his bow to the queen of the night; but the old original founders of the Hamley assemblies were dropping off; minuets had vanished with them, country dances had died away; quadrilles were in high vogue—nay, one or two of the high magnates of —shire were trying to introduce waltzing, as they had seen it in London, where it had come in with the visit of the allied sovereigns, when Edward Wilkins made his *début* on these boards. He had been at many splendid assemblies abroad, but still the little old ball-room attached to the George Inn in his native town was to him a place grander and more awful than the most magnificent saloons he had seen in Paris or Rome. He laughed at himself for this unreasonable feeling of awe; but there it was notwithstanding. He had been dining at the house of one of the lesser gentry, who was under considerable obligations to his father, and who was the parent of eight "muckle-moo'd" daughters, so hardly likely to oppose much aristocratic resistance to the elder Mr. Wilkins's clearly implied wish that Edward should be presented at the Hamley assembly-rooms. But many a squire glowered and looked black at the introduction of Wilkins the attorney's son into the sacred precincts; and perhaps there would have been much more mortification than pleasure in this assembly to the young man, had it not been for an incident that occurred pretty late in the evening. The lord-lieutenant of the county usually came with a large party to the Hamley assemblies once in a season; and this night he was expected, and with him a fashionable duchess

and her daughters. But time wore on, and they did not make their appearance. At last there was a rustling and a bustling, and in sailed the superb party. For a few minutes dancing was stopped; the earl led the duchess to a sofa; some of their acquaintances came up to speak to them; and then the quadrilles were finished in rather a flat manner. A country dance followed, in which none of the lord-lieutenant's party joined; then there was a consultation, a request, an inspection of the dancers, a message to the orchestra, and the band struck up a waltz; the duchess's daughters flew off to the music, and some more young ladies seemed ready to follow, but, alas! there was a lack of gentlemen acquainted with the new-fashioned dance. One of the stewards bethought him of young Wilkins, only just returned from the Continent. Edward was a beautiful dancer, and waltzed to admiration. For his next partner he had one of the Lady —s; for the duchess, to whom the —shire squires and their little county politics and contempts were alike unknown, saw no reason why her lovely Lady Sophy should not have a good partner, whatever his pedigree might be, and begged the stewards to introduce Mr. Wilkins to her. After this night his fortune was made with the young ladies of the Hamley assemblies. He was not unpopular with the mammas; but the heavy squires still looked at him askance, and the heirs (whom he had licked at Eton) called him an upstart behind his back.



CHAPTER II.

IT was not a satisfactory situation. Mr. Wilkins had given his son an education and tastes beyond his position. He could not associate with either profit or pleasure with the doctor or the brewer of Hamley; the vicar was old and deaf, the curate a raw young man, half frightened at the sound of his own voice. Then, as to matrimony—for the idea of his marriage was hardly more present in Edward's mind than in that of his father—he could scarcely fancy bringing home any one of the young ladies of Hamley to the elegant mansion, so full of suggestion and association to an educated person, so inappropriate a dwelling for an ignorant, uncouth, ill-brought-up girl. Yet Edward

was fully aware, if his fond father was not, that of all the young ladies who were glad enough of him as a partner at the Hamley assemblies, there was not one of them but would have considered herself affronted by an offer of marriage from an attorney, the son and grandson of attorneys. The young man had perhaps received many a slight and mortification pretty quietly during these years, which yet told upon his character in after life. Even at this very time they were having their effect. He was of too sweet a disposition to show resentment, as many men would have done. But nevertheless he took a secret pleasure in the power which his father's money gave him. He would buy an expensive horse after five minutes' conversation as to the price, about which a needy heir of one of the proud county families had been haggling for three weeks. His dogs were from the best kennels in England, no matter at what cost; his guns were the newest and most improved make; and all these were expenses on objects which were among those of daily envy to the squires and squires' sons around. They did not much care for the treasures of art, which report said were being accumulated in Mr. Wilkins's house. But they did covet the horses and hounds he possessed, and the young man knew that they coveted, and rejoiced in it.

By-and-by he formed a marriage, which went as near as marriages ever do towards pleasing everybody. He was desperately in love with Miss Lamotte, so he was delighted when she consented to be his wife. His father was delighted in his delight, and, besides, was charmed to remember that Miss Lamotte's mother had been Sir Frank Holster's younger sister, and that, although her marriage had been disowned by her family, as beneath her in rank, yet no one could efface her name out of the Baronetage, where Lettice, youngest daughter of Sir Mark Holster, born 1772, married H. Lamotte, 1799, died 1810, was duly chronicled. She had left two children, a boy and a girl, of whom their uncle, Sir Frank, took charge, as their father was worse than dead—an outlaw whose name was never mentioned. Mark Lamotte was in the army; Lettice had a dependent position in her uncle's family; not intentionally made more dependent than was rendered necessary by circumstances, but still dependent enough to grate on the feelings of a sensitive girl, whose natural susceptibility to slights was redoubled by the constant recollection of her father's disgrace.

As Mr. Wilkins well knew, Sir Frank was considerably involved; but it was with very mixed feelings that he listened to the suit which would provide his penniless niece with a comfortable, not to say luxurious, home, and with a handsome, accomplished young man of unblemished character for a husband. He said one or two bitter and insolent things to Mr. Wilkins, even while he was giving his consent to the match; that was his temper, his proud, evil temper; but he really and permanently was satisfied with the connection, though he would occasionally turn round on his nephew-in-law, and sting him with a covert insult, as to his want of birth, and the inferior position which he held, forgetting, apparently, that his own brother-in-law and Lettice's father might be at any moment brought to the bar of justice if he attempted to re-enter his native country.

Edward was annoyed at all this; Lettice resented it. She loved her husband dearly, and was proud of him, for she had discernment enough to see how superior he was in every way to her cousins, the young Holsters, who borrowed his horses, drank his wines, and yet had caught their father's habit of sneering at his profession. Lettice wished that Edward would content himself with a purely domestic life, would let himself drop out of the company of the —shire squirearchy, and find his relaxation with her, in their luxurious library, or lovely drawing-room, so full of white gleaming statues, and gems of pictures. But, perhaps, this was too much to expect of any man, especially of one who felt himself fitted in many ways to shine in society, and who was social by nature. Sociality in that county at that time meant conviviality. Edward did not care for wine, and yet he was obliged to drink—and by-and-by he grew to pique himself on his character as a judge of wine. His father by this time was dead; dead, happy old man, with a contented heart—his affairs flourishing, his poorer neighbours loving him, his richer respecting him, his son and daughter-in-law, the most affectionate and devoted that ever man had, and his healthy conscience at peace with his God.

Lettice could have lived to herself and her husband and children. Edward daily required more and more the stimulus of society. His wife wondered how he could care to accept dinner invitations from people who treated him as "Wilkins the attorney, a very good sort of fellow," as they introduced

him to strangers who might be staying in the country, but who had no power to appreciate the taste, the talents, the impulsive artistic nature which she held so dear. She forgot that by accepting such invitations Edward was occasionally brought into contact with people not merely of high conventional, but of high intellectual rank; that when a certain amount of wine had dissipated his sense of inferiority of rank and position, he was a brilliant talker, a man to be listened to and admired even by wandering London statesmen, professional diners-out, or any great authors who might find themselves visitors in a —shire country-house. What she would have had him share from the pride of her heart, she should have warned him to avoid from the temptations to sinful extravagance which it led him into. He had begun to spend more than he ought, not in intellectual—though that would have been wrong—but in purely sensual things. His wines, his table, should be such as no squire's purse or palate could command. His dinner-parties—small in number, the viands rare and delicate in quality, and sent up to table by an Italian cook—should be such as even the London stars should notice with admiration. He would have Lettice dressed in the richest materials, the most delicate lace; jewellery, he said, was beyond their means; glancing with proud humility at the diamonds of the elder ladies, and the alloyed gold of the younger. But he managed to spend as much on his wife's lace as would have bought many a set of inferior jewellery. Lettice well became it all. If, as people said, her father had been nothing but a French adventurer, she bore traces of her nature in her grace, her delicacy, her fascinating and elegant ways of doing all things. She was made for society; and yet she hated it. And one day she went out of it altogether and for evermore. She had been well in the morning when Edward went down to his office in Hamley. At noon he was sent for by hurried trembling messengers. When he got home breathless and uncomprehending, she was past speech. One glance from her lovely loving black eyes showed that she recognised him with the passionate yearning that had been one of the characteristics of her love through life. There was no word passed between them. He could not speak, any more than could she. He knelt down by her. She was dying; she was dead; and he knelt on immovable. They brought him his eldest child, Ellinor, in utter despair what to do in order to

rouse him. They had no thought as to the effect on her, hitherto shut up in the nursery during this busy day of confusion and alarm. The child had no idea of death, and her father, kneeling and tearless, was far less an object of surprise or interest to her than her mother, lying still and white, and not turning her head to smile at her darling.

"Mamma! mamma!" cried the child, in shapeless terror. But the mother never stirred; and the father hid his face yet deeper in the bedclothes, to stifle a cry as if a sharp knife had pierced his heart. The child forced her impetuous way from her attendants, and rushed to the bed. Undeterred by deadly cold or stony immobility, she kissed the lips and stroked the glossy raven hair, murmuring sweet words of wild love, such as had passed between the mother and child often and often when no witnesses were by; and altogether seemed so nearly beside herself in an agony of love and terror, that Edward arose, and softly taking her in his arms, bore her away, lying back like one dead (so exhausted was she by the terrible emotion they had forced on her childish heart), into his study, a little room opening out of the grand library, where on happy evenings, never to come again, he and his wife were wont to retire to have coffee together, and then perhaps stroll out of the glass door into the open air, the shrubbery, the fields—never more to be trodden by those dear feet. What passed between father and child in this seclusion none could tell. Late in the evening Ellinor's supper was sent for, and the servant who brought it in saw the child lying as one dead in her father's arms, and before he left the room, watched his master feeding her, the girl of six years of age, with as tender care as if she had been a baby of six months.

CHAPTER III.

FROM that time the tie between father and daughter grew very strong and tender indeed. Ellinor, it is true, divided her affection between her baby sister and her papa; but he, caring little for babies, had only a theoretic regard for his younger child, while the elder absorbed all his love. Every day that he dined at home Ellinor was placed opposite to him while he ate his late dinner; she sat where her mother had done during the meal,

although she had dined and even supped some time before on the more primitive nursery fare. It was half pitiful, half amusing, to see the little girl's grave, thoughtful ways and modes of speech, as if trying to act up to the dignity of her place as her father's companion, till sometimes the little head nodded off to slumber in the middle of lisping some wise little speech. "Old-fashioned," the nurses called her, and prophesied that she would not live long in consequence of her old-fashionedness. But instead of the fulfilment of this prophecy, the fat bright baby was seized with fits, and was well, ill, and dead in a day! Ellinor's grief was something alarming, from its quietness and concealment. She waited till she was left—as she thought—alone at nights, and then sobbed and cried her passionate cry for "Baby, baby, come back to me—come back;" till every one feared for the health of the frail little girl whose childish affections had had to stand two such shocks. Her father put aside all business, all pleasure of every kind, to win his darling from her grief. No mother could have done more, no tenderest nurse done half so much as Mr. Wilkins then did for Ellinor.

If it had not been for him she would have just died of her grief. As it was, she overcame it—but slowly, wearily—hardly letting herself love any one for some time, as if she instinctively feared lest all her strong attachments should find a sudden end in death. Her love—thus dammed up into a small space—at last burst its banks, and overflowed on her father. It was a rich reward to him for all his care of her, and he took delight—perhaps a selfish delight—in all the many pretty ways she perpetually found of convincing him, if he had needed conviction, that he was ever the first object with her. The nurse told him that half-an-hour or so before the earliest time at which he could be expected home in the evenings, Miss Ellinor began to fold up her doll's things and lull the inanimate treasure to sleep. Then she would sit and listen with an intensity of attention for his footstep. Once the nurse had expressed some wonder at the distance at which Ellinor could hear her father's approach, saying that she had listened and could not hear a sound, to which Ellinor had replied—

"Of course you cannot; he is not your papa!"

Then, when he went away in the morning, after he had kissed her, Ellinor would run to a certain window from which she could

watch him up the lane, now hidden behind a hedge, now re-appearing through an open space, again out of sight, till he reached a great old beech-tree, where for an instant more she saw him. And then she would turn away with a sigh, sometimes reassuring her unspoken fears by saying softly to herself—

“He will come again to-night.”

Mr. Wilkins liked to feel his child dependent on him for all her pleasures. He was even a little jealous of any one who devised a treat or conferred a present, the first news of which did not come from or through him.

At last it was necessary that Ellinor should have some more instruction than her good old nurse could give. Her father did not care to take upon himself the office of teacher, which he thought he foresaw would necessitate occasional blame, an occasional exercise of authority, which might possibly render him less idolised by his little girl; so he commissioned Lady Holster to choose out one among her many *protégées* for a governess to his daughter. Now, Lady Holster, who kept a sort of amateur county register-office, was only too glad to be made of use in this way; but when she inquired a little further as to the sort of person required, all she could extract from Mr. Wilkins was—

“You know the kind of education a lady should have, and will, I am sure, choose a governess for Ellinor better than I could direct you. Only, please, choose some one who will not marry me, and who will let Ellinor go on making my tea, and doing pretty much what she likes, for she is so good they need not try to make her better, only to teach her what a lady should know.”

Miss Monroe was selected—a plain, intelligent, quiet woman of forty—and it was difficult to decide whether she or Mr. Wilkins took the most pains to avoid each other, acting with regard to Ellinor, pretty much like the famous Adam and Eve in the weather-glass: when the one came out the other went in. Miss Monroe had been tossed about and overworked quite enough in her life not to value the privilege and indulgence of her evenings to herself, her comfortable schoolroom, her quiet cosy teas, her book, or her letter-writing afterwards. By mutual agreement she did not interfere with Ellinor and her ways and occupations on the evenings when the girl had not her father for companion; and these occasions became more and more frequent as years passed on, and the deep shadow was lightened

which the sudden death that had visited his household had cast over him. As I have said before, he was always a popular man at dinner-parties. His amount of intelligence and accomplishment was rare in —shire, and if it required more wine than formerly to bring his conversation up to the desired point of range and brilliancy, wine was not an article spared or grugged at the county dinner-tables. Occasionally his business took him up to London. Hurried as these journeys might be, he never returned without a new game, a new toy of some kind, to "make home pleasant to his little maid," as he expressed himself.

He liked, too, to see what was doing in art, or in literature; and as he gave pretty extensive orders for anything he admired, he was almost sure to be followed down to Hamley by one or two packages or parcels, the arrival and opening of which began soon to form the pleasant epochs in Ellinor's grave though happy life.

The only person of his own standing with whom Mr. Wilkins kept up any intercourse in Hamley was the new clergyman, a bachelor, about his own age, a learned man, a fellow of his college, whose first claim on Mr. Wilkins's attention was the fact that he had been travelling-bachelor for his university, and had consequently been on the Continent about the very same two years that Mr. Wilkins had been there; and although they had never met, yet they had many common acquaintances and common recollections to talk over of this period, which, after all, had been about the most bright and hopeful of Mr. Wilkins's life.

Mr. Ness had an occasional pupil; that is to say, he never put himself out of the way to obtain pupils, but did not refuse the entreaties sometimes made to him that he would prepare a young man for college, by allowing the said young man to reside and read with him. "Ness's men" took rather high honours, for the tutor, too indolent to find out work for himself, had a certain pride in doing well the work that was found for him.

When Ellinor was somewhere about fourteen, a young Mr. Corbet came to be pupil to Mr. Ness. Her father always called on the young men reading with the clergyman, and asked them to his house. His hospitality had in course of time lost its *recherché* and elegant character, but was always

generous, and often profuse. Besides, it was in his character to like the joyous, thoughtless company of the young better than that of the old—given the same amount of refinement and education in both.

Mr. Corbet was a young man of very good family, from a distant county. If his character had not been so grave and deliberate, his years would only have entitled him to be called a boy, for he was but eighteen at the time when he came to read with Mr. Ness. But many men of five-and-twenty have not reflected so deeply as this young Mr. Corbet already had. He had considered and almost matured his plan for life; had ascertained what objects he desired most to accomplish in the dim future, which is to many at his age only a shapeless mist; and had resolved on certain steady courses of action by which such objects were most likely to be secured. A younger son, his family connections and family interest pre-arranged a legal career for him; and it was in accordance with his own tastes and talents. All, however, which his father hoped for him was, that he might be able to make an income sufficient for a gentleman to live on. Old Mr. Corbet was hardly to be called ambitious, or, if he were, his ambition was limited to views for the eldest son. But Ralph intended to be a distinguished lawyer, not so much for the vision of the woollen sack, which I suppose dances before the imagination of every young lawyer, as for the grand intellectual exercise, and consequent power over mankind, that distinguished lawyers may always possess if they choose. A seat in Parliament, statesmanship, and all the great scope for a powerful and active mind that lay on each side of such a career—these were the objects which Ralph Corbet set before himself. To take high honours at college was the first step to be accomplished; and in order to achieve this Ralph had, not persuaded—persuasion was a weak instrument which he despised—but gravely reasoned his father into consenting to pay the large sum which Mr. Ness expected with a pupil. The good-natured old squire was rather pressed for ready money, but sooner than listen to an argument instead of taking his nap after dinner he would have yielded anything. But this did not satisfy Ralph; his father's reason must be convinced of the desirability of the step, as well as his weak will give way. The squire listened, looked wise, sighed; spoke of Edward's extravagance and the girls' expenses, grew sleepy,

and said, "Very true," "That is but reasonable, certainly," glanced at the door, and wondered when his son would have ended his talking and go into the drawing-room; and at length found himself writing the desired letter to Mr. Ness, consenting to everything, terms and all. Mr. Ness never had a more satisfactory pupil; one whom he could treat more as an intellectual equal.

Mr. Corbet, as Ralph was always called in Hamley, was resolute in his cultivation of himself, even exceeding what his tutor demanded of him. He was greedy of information in the hours not devoted to absolute study. Mr. Ness enjoyed giving information, but most of all he liked the hard tough arguments on all metaphysical and ethical questions in which Mr. Corbet delighted to engage him. They lived together on terms of happy equality, having thus much in common. They were essentially different, however, although there were so many points of resemblance. Mr. Ness was unworldly as far as the idea of real unworldliness is compatible with a turn for self-indulgence and indolence; while Mr. Corbet was deeply, radically worldly, yet for the accomplishment of his object could deny himself all the careless pleasures natural to his age. The tutor and pupil allowed themselves one frequent relaxation, that of Mr. Wilkins's company. Mr. Ness would stroll to the office after the six hours' hard reading were over—leaving Mr. Corbet still bent over the table, book bestrewn—and see what Mr. Wilkins's engagements were. If he had nothing better to do that evening, he was either asked to dine at the parsonage, or he, in his careless hospitable way, invited the other two to dine with him, Ellinor forming the fourth at table, as far as seats went, although her dinner had been eaten early with Miss Monro. She was little and slight of her age, and her father never seemed to understand how she was passing out of childhood. Yet while in stature she was like a child; in intellect, in force of character, in strength of clinging affection, she was a woman. There might be much of the simplicity of a child about her, there was little of the undeveloped girl, varying from day to day like an April sky, careless as to which way her own character is tending. So the two young people sat with their elders, and both relished the company they were thus prematurely thrown into. Mr. Corbet talked as much as either of the other two gentlemen; opposing and disputing on any

side, as if to find out how much he could urge against received opinions. Ellinor sat silent; her dark eyes flashing from time to time in vehement interest—sometimes in vehement indignation if Mr. Corbet, riding a-tilt at every one, ventured to attack her father. He saw how this course excited her, and rather liked pursuing it in consequence; he thought it only amused him.

Another way in which Ellinor and Mr. Corbet were thrown together occasionally was this: Mr. Ness and Mr. Wilkins shared the same *Times* between them; and it was Ellinor's duty to see that the paper was regularly taken from her father's house to the parsonage. Her father liked to dawdle over it. Until Mr. Corbet had come to live with him, Mr. Ness had not much cared at what time it was passed on to him; but the young man took a strong interest in all public events, and especially in all that was said about them. He grew impatient if the paper was not forthcoming, and would set off himself to go for it, sometimes meeting the penitent breathless Ellinor in the long lane which led from Hamley to Mr. Wilkins's house. At first he used to receive her eager "Oh! I am so sorry, Mr. Corbet, but papa has only just done with it," rather gruffly. After a time he had the grace to tell her it did not signify; and by-and-by he would turn back with her to give her some advice about her garden, or her plants—for his mother and sisters were first-rate practical gardeners, and he himself was, as he expressed it, "a capital consulting physician for a sickly plant."

All this time his voice, his step, never raised the child's colour one shade the higher, never made her heart beat the least quicker, as the slightest sign of her father's approach was wont to do. She learnt to rely on Mr. Corbet for advice, for a little occasional sympathy, and for much condescending attention. He also gave her more fault-finding than all the rest of the world put together; and, curiously enough, she was grateful to him for it, for she really was humble and wished to improve. He liked the attitude of superiority which this implied and exercised right gave him. They were very good friends at present. Nothing more.

All this time I have spoken only of Mr. Wilkins's life as he stood in relation to his daughter. But there is far more to be said about it. After his wife's death, he withdrew himself from society for a year or two in a more positive and decided

manner than is common with widowers. It was during this retirement of his that he riveted his little daughter's heart in such a way as to influence all her future life.

When he began to go out again, it might have been perceived—had any one cared to notice—how much the different characters of his father and wife had influenced him and kept him steady. Not that he broke out into any immoral conduct, but he gave up time to pleasure, which both old Mr. Wilkins and Lettice would have quietly induced him to spend in the office, superintending his business. His indulgence in hunting, and all field sports, had hitherto been only occasional; they now became habitual, as far as the seasons permitted. He shared a moor in Scotland with one of the Holsters one year, persuading himself that the bracing air was good for Ellinor's health. But the year afterwards he took another, this time joining with a comparative stranger; and on this moor there was no house to which it was fit to bring a child and her attendants. He persuaded himself that by frequent journeys he could make up for his absences from Hamley. But journeys cost money; and he was often away from his office when important business required attending to. There was some talk of a new attorney setting up in Hamley, to be supported by one or two of the more influential county families, who had found Wilkins not so attentive as his father. Sir Frank Holster sent for his relation, and told him of this project, speaking to him, at the same time, in pretty round terms on the folly of the life he was leading. Foolish it certainly was, and as such Mr. Wilkins was secretly acknowledging it; but when Sir Frank, lashing himself, began to talk of his hearer's presumption in joining the hunt, in aping the mode of life and amusements of the landed gentry, Edward fired up. He knew how much Sir Frank was dipped, and comparing it with the round sum his own father had left him, he said some plain truths to Sir Frank which the latter never forgave, and henceforth there was no intercourse between Holster Court and Ford Bank, as Mr. Edward Wilkins had christened his father's house on his first return from the Continent.

The conversation had two consequences besides the immediate one of the quarrel. Mr. Wilkins advertised for a responsible and confidential clerk to conduct the business under his own superintendence; and he also wrote to the Heralds' College to

ask if he did not belong to the family bearing the same name in South Wales—those who have since reassumed their ancient name of De Winton.

Both applications were favourably answered. A skilful, experienced, middle-aged clerk was recommended to him by one of the principal legal firms in London, and immediately engaged to come to Hamley at his own terms; which were pretty high. But, as Mr. Wilkins said it was worth any money to pay for the relief from constant responsibility which such a business as his involved, some people remarked that he had never appeared to feel the responsibility very much hitherto, as witness his absences in Scotland, and his various social engagements when at home; it had been very different (they said) in his father's day. The Heralds' College held out hopes of affiliating him to the South Wales family, but it would require time and money to make the requisite inquiries and substantiate the claim. Now, in many a place there would be none to contest the right a man might have to assert that he belonged to such and such a family, or even to assume their arms. But it was otherwise in —shire. Every one was up in genealogy and heraldry, and considered filching a name and a pedigree a far worse sin than any of those mentioned in the Commandments. There were those among them who would doubt and dispute even the decision of the Heralds' College; but with it, if in his favour, Mr. Wilkins intended to be satisfied, and accordingly he wrote in reply to their letter, to say, that of course he was aware such inquiries would take a considerable sum of money, but still he wished them to be made, and that speedily.

Before the end of the year he went up to London to order a brougham to be built (for Ellinor to drive out in in wet weather, he said; but as going in a closed carriage always made her ill, he used it principally himself in driving to dinner-parties), with the De Winton Wilkinses' arms neatly emblazoned on panel and harness. Hitherto he had always gone about in a dog-cart—the immediate descendant of his father's old-fashioned gig.

For all this, the squires, his employers, only laughed at him, and did not treat him with one whit more respect.

Mr. Dunster, the new clerk, was a quiet, respectable-looking man; you could not call him a gentleman in manner, and

yet no one could say he was vulgar. He had not much varying expression on his face, but a permanent one of thoughtful consideration of the subject in hand, whatever it might be, that would have fitted as well with the profession of medicine as with that of law, and was quite the right look for either. Occasionally a bright flash of sudden intelligence lightened up his deep-sunk eyes, but even this was quickly extinguished as by some inward repression, and the habitually reflective, subdued expression returned to the face. As soon as he came into his situation, he first began quietly to arrange the papers, and next the business of which they were the outer sign, into more methodical order than they had been in since old Mr. Wilkins's death. Punctual to a moment himself, he looked his displeased surprise when the inferior clerks came tumbling in half-an-hour after the time in the morning; and his look was more effective than many men's words; henceforward the subordinates were within five minutes of the appointed hour for opening the office; but still he was always there before them. Mr. Wilkins himself winced under his new clerk's order and punctuality; Mr. Dunster's raised eyebrow and contraction of the lips at some woeful confusion in the business of the office, chafed Mr. Wilkins more, far more, than any open expression of opinion would have done; for that he could have met, and explained away as he fancied. A secret respectful dislike grew up in his bosom against Mr. Dunster. He esteemed him, he valued him, and he could not bear him. Year after year Mr. Wilkins had become more under the influence of his feelings, and less under the command of his reason. He rather cherished than repressed his nervous repugnance to the harsh measured tones of Mr. Dunster's voice; the latter spoke with a provincial twang which grated on his employer's sensitive ear. He was annoyed at a certain green coat which his new clerk brought with him, and he watched its increasing shabbiness with a sort of childish pleasure. But by-and-by Mr. Wilkins found out that, from some perversity of taste, Mr. Dunster always had his coats, Sunday and working-day, made of this obnoxious colour; and this knowledge did not diminish his secret irritation. The worst of all, perhaps, was, that Mr. Dunster was really invaluable in many ways; "a perfect treasure," as Mr. Wilkins used to term him in speaking of him after dinner; but, for

all that, he came to hate his "perfect treasure," as he gradually felt that Dunster had become so indispensable to the business that his chief could not do without him.

The clients re-echoed Mr. Wilkins's words, and spoke of Mr. Dunster as invaluable to his master; a thorough treasure, the very saving of the business. They had not been better attended to, not even in old Mr. Wilkins's days; such a clear head, such a knowledge of law, such a steady, upright fellow, always at his post. The grating voice, the drawling accent, the bottle-green coat, were nothing to them; far less noticed, in fact, than Wilkins's expensive habits, the money he paid for his wine and horses, and the nonsense of claiming kin with the Welsh Wilkinsons, and setting up his brougham to drive about—shire lanes, and be knocked to pieces over the rough round paving-stones thereof.

All these remarks did not come near Ellinor to trouble her life. To her, her dear father was the first of human beings; so sweet, so good, so kind, so charming in conversation, so full of accomplishment and information! To her healthy, happy mind every one turned their bright side. She loved Miss Monro—all the servants—especially Dixon, the coachman. He had been her father's playfellow as a boy, and, with all his respect and admiration for his master, the freedom of intercourse that had been established between them then had never been quite lost. Dixon was a fine, stalwart old fellow, and was as harmonious in his ways with his master as Mr. Dunster was discordant; accordingly he was a great favourite, and could say many a thing which might have been taken as impertinent from another servant.

He was Ellinor's great confidant about many of her little plans and projects; things that she dared not speak of to Mr. Corbet, who, after her father and Dixon, was her next best friend. This intimacy with Dixon displeased Mr. Corbet. He once or twice insinuated that he did not think it was well to talk so familiarly as Ellinor did with a servant—one out of a completely different class—such as Dixon. Ellinor did not easily take hints; every one had spoken plain out to her hitherto; so Mr. Corbet had to say his meaning plain out at last. Then, for the first time, he saw her angry; but she was too young, too childish, to have words at will to express her feelings; she only could say broken beginnings of sentences,

such as "What a shame! Good, dear Dixon, who is as loyal and true and kind as any nobleman. I like him far better than you, Mr. Corbet, and I shall talk to him." And then she burst into tears and ran away, and would not come to wish Mr. Corbet good-bye, though she knew she should not see him again for a long time, as he was returning the next day to his father's house, from whence he would go to Cambridge.

He was annoyed at this result of the good advice he had thought himself bound to give to a motherless girl, who had no one to instruct her in the proprieties in which his own sisters were brought up; he left Hamley both sorry and displeased. As for Ellinor, when she found out the next day that he really was gone—gone without even coming to Ford Bank again to see if she were not penitent for her angry words—gone without saying or hearing a word of good-bye—she shut herself up in her room, and cried more bitterly than ever, because anger against herself was mixed with her regret for his loss. Luckily, her father was dining out, or he would have inquired what was the matter with his darling; and she would have had to try to explain what could not be explained. As it was, she sat with her back to the light during the schoolroom tea, and afterwards, when Miss Monro had settled down to her study of the Spanish language, Ellinor stole out into the garden, meaning to have a fresh cry over her own naughtiness and Mr. Corbet's departure; but the August evening was still and calm, and put her passionate grief to shame, hushing her up, as it were, with the other young creatures, who were being soothed to rest by the serene time of day, and the subdued light of the twilight sky.

There was a piece of ground surrounding the flower-garden, which was not shrubbery, nor wood, nor kitchen-garden—only a grassy bit, out of which a group of old forest trees sprang. Their roots were heaved above ground; their leaves fell in autumn so profusely that the turf was ragged and bare in spring; but, to make up for this, there never was such a place for snowdrops.

The roots of these old trees were Ellinor's favourite play-place; this space between these two was her doll's kitchen, that its drawing-room, and so on. Mr. Corbet rather despised her contrivances for doll's furniture, so she had not often brought him here; but Dixon delighted in them, and contrived

and planned with the eagerness of six years old rather than forty. To-night Ellinor went to this place, and there were all a new collection of ornaments for Miss Dolly's sitting-room made out of fir-bobs, in the prettiest and most ingenious way. She knew it was Dixon's doing, and rushed off in search of him to thank him.

"What's the matter with my pretty?" asked Dixon, as soon as the pleasant excitement of thanking and being thanked was over, and he had leisure to look at her tear-stained face.

"Oh, I don't know! Never mind," said she, reddening.

Dixon was silent for a minute or two, while she tried to turn off his attention by her hurried prattle.

"There's no trouble afoot that I can mend?" asked he, in a minute or two.

"Oh, no! It's really nothing—nothing at all," said she. "It's only that Mr. Corbet went away without saying good-bye to me, that's all." And she looked as if she should have liked to cry again.

"That was not manners," said Dixon decisively.

"But it was my fault," replied Ellinor, pleading against the condemnation.

Dixon looked at her pretty sharply from under his ragged bushy eyebrows.

"He had been giving me a lecture, and saying I didn't do what his sisters did—just as if I were to be always trying to be like somebody else—and I was cross and ran away."

"Then it was Missy who wouldn't say good-bye. That was not manners in Missy."

"But, Dixon, I don't like being lectured!"

"I reckon you don't get much of it. But, indeed, my pretty, I dare say Mr. Corbet was in the right; for, you see, master is busy, and Miss Monro is so dreadful learned, and your poor mother is dead and gone, and you have no one to teach you how young ladies go on; and by all accounts Mr. Corbet comes of a good family. I've heard say his father had the best stud-farm in all Shropshire, and spared no money upon it; and the young ladies his sisters will have been taught the best of manners; it might be well for my pretty to hear how they go on."

"You dear old Dixon, you don't know anything about my lecture, and I'm not going to tell you. Only I dare say Mr.

Corbet might be a little bit right, though I'm sure he was a great deal wrong."

"But you'll not go on a-fretting—you won't now, there's a good young lady—for master won't like it, and it'll make him uneasy, and he's enough of trouble without your red eyes, bless them."

"Trouble—papa, trouble! Oh, Dixon! what do you mean?" exclaimed Ellinor, her face taking all a woman's intensity of expression in a minute.

"Nay, I know nought," said Dixon evasively. "Only that Dunster fellow is not to my mind, and I think he potters the master sadly with his fid-fad ways."

"I hate Mr. Dunster!" said Ellinor vehemently. "I won't speak a word to him the next time he comes to dine with papa."

"Missy will do what papa likes best," said Dixon admonishingly; and with this the pair of "friends" parted.

CHAPTER IV.

THE summer afterwards Mr. Corbet came again to read with Mr. Ness. He did not perceive any alteration in himself, and indeed his early-matured character had hardly made progress during the last twelve months, whatever intellectual acquirements he might have made. Therefore it was astonishing to him to see the alteration in Ellinor Wilkins. She had shot up from a rather puny girl to a tall, slight young lady, with promise of great beauty in the face, which a year ago had only been remarkable for the fineness of the eyes. Her complexion was clear now, although colourless—twelve months ago he would have called it sallow—her delicate cheek was smooth as marble, her teeth were even and white, and her rare smiles called out a lovely dimple.

She met her former friend and lecturer with a grave shyness, for she remembered well how they had parted, and thought he could hardly have forgiven, much less forgotten, her passionate flinging away from him. But the truth was, after the first few hours of offended displeasure, he had ceased to think of it at

all. She, poor child, by way of proving her repentance, had tried hard to reform her boisterous tom-boy manners, in order to show him that, although she would not give up her dear old friend Dixon, at his or any one's bidding, she would strive to profit by his lectures in all things reasonable. The consequence was, that she suddenly appeared to him as an elegant dignified young lady, instead of the rough little girl he remembered. Still below her somewhat formal manners there lurked the old wild spirit, as he could plainly see after a little more watching; and he began to wish to call this out, and to strive, by reminding her of old days, and all her childish frolics, to flavour her subdued manners and speech with a little of the former originality.

In this he succeeded. No one, neither Mr. Wilkins, nor Miss Monro, nor Mr. Ness, saw what this young couple were about—they did not know it themselves; but before the summer was over they were desperately in love with each other, or perhaps I should rather say, Ellinor was desperately in love with him—he, as passionately as he could be with any one; but in him the intellect was superior in strength to either affections or passions.

The causes of the blindness of those around them were these: Mr. Wilkins still considered Ellinor as a little girl, as his own pet, his darling, but nothing more. Miss Monro was anxious about her own improvement. Mr. Ness was deep in a new edition of "Horace," which he was going to bring out with notes. I believe Dixon would have been keener-sighted, but Ellinor kept Mr. Corbet and Dixon apart for obvious reasons—they were each her dear friends, but she knew that Mr. Corbet did not like Dixon, and suspected that the feeling was mutual.

The only change of circumstances between this year and the previous one consisted in this development of attachment between the young people. Otherwise, everything went on apparently as usual. With Ellinor the course of the day was something like this: up early and into the garden until breakfast time, when she made tea for her father and Miss Monro in the dining-room, always taking care to lay a little nosegay of freshly gathered flowers by her father's plate. After breakfast, when the conversation had been on general and indifferent subjects, Mr. Wilkins withdrew into the little study so often mentioned. It opened out of a passage that ran between the

dining-room and the kitchen, on the left hand of the hall. Corresponding to the dining-room on the other side of the hall was the drawing-room, with its side-window serving as a door into a conservatory, and this again opened into the library. Old Mr. Wilkins had added a semicircular projection to the library, which was lighted by a dome above, and showed off his son's Italian purchases of sculpture. The library was by far the most striking and agreeable room in the house; and the consequence was that the drawing-room was seldom used, and had the aspect of cold discomfort common to apartments rarely occupied. Mr. Wilkins's study, on the other side of the house, was also an afterthought, built only a few years ago, and projecting from the regularity of the outside wall; a little stone passage led to it from the hall, small, narrow, and dark, and out of which no other door opened.

The study itself was a hexagon, one side window, one fire-place, and the remaining four sides occupied with doors, two of which have been already mentioned, another at the foot of the narrow winding stairs which led straight into Mr. Wilkins's bedroom over the dining-room, and the fourth opening into a path through the shrubbery to the right of the flower-garden as you looked from the house. This path led through the stable-yard, and then by a short cut right into Hamley, and brought you out close to Mr. Wilkins's office; it was by this way he always went and returned to his business. He used the study for a smoking and lounging room principally, although he always spoke of it as a convenient place for holding confidential communications with such of his clients as did not like discussing their business within the possible hearing of all the clerks in his office. By the outer door he could also pass to the stables, and see that proper care was taken at all times of his favourite and valuable horses. Into this study Ellinor would follow him of a morning, helping him on with his greatcoat, mending his gloves, talking an infinite deal of merry fond nothing; and then, clinging to his arm, she would accompany him in his visits to the stables, going up to the shyest horses, and petting them, and patting them, and feeding them with bread all the time that her father held converse with Dixon. When he was finally gone—and sometimes it was a long time first—she returned to the schoolroom to Miss Monroe, and tried to set herself hard at work on her lessons. But she had not

much time for steady application ; if her father had cared for her progress in anything, she would and could have worked hard at that study or accomplishment ; but Mr. Wilkins, the ease and pleasure loving man, did not wish to make himself into the pedagogue, as he would have considered it, if he had ever questioned Ellinor with a real steady purpose of ascertaining her intellectual progress. It was quite enough for him that her general intelligence and variety of desultory and miscellaneous reading made her a pleasant and agreeable companion for his hours of relaxation.

At twelve o'clock, Ellinor put away her books with joyful eagerness, kissed Miss Monro, asked her if they should go a regular walk, and was always rather thankful when it was decided that it would be better to stroll in the garden—a decision very often come to, for Miss Monro hated fatigue, hated dirt, hated scrambling, and dreaded rain ; all of which are evils, the chances of which are never far distant from country walks. So Ellinor danced out into the garden, worked away among her flowers, played at the old games among the roots of the trees, and, when she could, seduced Dixon into the flower-garden to have a little consultation as to the horses and dogs. For it was one of her father's few strict rules that Ellinor was never to go into the stable-yard unless he were with her ; so these *tête-à-têtes* with Dixon were always held in the flower-garden, or bit of forest ground surrounding it. Miss Monro sat and basked in the sun, close to the dial, which made the centre of the gay flower-beds, upon which the dining-room and study windows looked.

At one o'clock, Ellinor and Miss Monro dined. An hour was allowed for Miss Monro's digestion, which Ellinor again spent out of doors, and at three, lessons began again and lasted till five. At that time they went to dress preparatory for the schoolroom tea at half-past five. After tea Ellinor tried to prepare her lessons for the next day ; but all the time she was listening for her father's footstep—the moment she heard that, she dashed down her book, and flew out of the room to welcome and kiss him. Seven was his dinner-hour ; he hardly ever dined alone ; indeed, he often dined from home four days out of seven, and when he had no engagement to take him out he liked to have some one to keep him company : Mr. Ness very often, Mr. Corbet along with him if he was in Hamley,

a stranger friend, or one of his clients. Sometimes, reluctantly, and when he fancied he could not avoid the attention without giving offence, Mr. Wilkins would ask Mr. Dunster, and then the two would always follow Ellinor into the library at a very early hour, as if their subjects for *tête-à-tête* conversation were quite exhausted. With all his other visitors, Mr. Wilkins sat long—yes, and yearly longer; with Mr. Ness, because they became interested in each other's conversation; with some of the others, because the wine was good, and the host hated to spare it.

Mr. Corbet used to leave his tutor and Mr. Wilkins and saunter into the library. There sat Ellinor and Miss Monro, each busy with their embroidery. He would bring a stool to Ellinor's side, question and tease her, interest her, and they would become entirely absorbed in each other, Miss Monro's sense of propriety being entirely set at rest by the consideration that Mr. Wilkins must know what he was about in allowing a young man to become thus intimate with his daughter, who, after all, was but a child.

Mr. Corbet had lately fallen into the habit of walking up to Ford Bank for the *Times* every day, near twelve o'clock, and lounging about in the garden until one; not exactly with either Ellinor or Miss Monro, but certainly far more at the beck and call of the one than of the other.

Miss Monro used to think he would have been glad to stay and lunch at their early dinner, but she never gave the invitation, and he could not well stay without her expressed sanction. He told Ellinor all about his mother and sisters, and their ways of going on, and spoke of them and of his father as of people she was one day certain to know, and to know intimately; and she did not question or doubt this view of things; she simply acquiesced.

He had some discussion with himself as to whether he should speak to her, and so secure her promise to be his before returning to Cambridge or not. He did not like the formality of an application to Mr. Wilkins, which would, after all, have been the proper and straightforward course to pursue with a girl of her age—she was barely sixteen. Not that he anticipated any difficulty on Mr. Wilkins's part; his approval of the intimacy which at their respective ages was pretty sure to lead to an attachment, was made as evident as could be by actions

without words. But there would have to be reference to his own father, who had no notion of the whole affair, and would be sure to treat it as a boyish fancy; as if at twenty-one Ralph was not a man, as clear and deliberative in knowing his own mind, as resolute as he ever would be in deciding upon the course of exertion that should lead him to independence and fame, if such were to be attained by clear intellect and a strong will.

No; to Mr. Wilkins he would not speak for another year or two.

But should he tell Ellinor in direct terms of his love—his intention to marry her?

Again he inclined to the more prudent course of silence. He was not afraid of any change in his own inclinations: of them he was sure. But he looked upon it in this way: If he made a regular declaration to her she would be bound to tell it to her father. He should not respect her or like her so much if she did not. And yet this course would lead to all the conversations, and discussions, and references to his own father, which made his own direct appeal to Mr. Wilkins appear a premature step to him.

Whereas he was as sure of Ellinor's love for him as if she had uttered all the vows that women ever spoke; he knew even better than she did how fully and entirely that innocent girlish heart was his own. He was too proud to dread her inconstancy for an instant; "besides," as he went on to himself, as if to make assurance doubly sure, "whom does she see? Those stupid Holsters, who ought to be only too proud of having such a girl for their cousin, ignore her existence, and spoke slightly of her father only the very last time I dined there. The country people in this precisely Bœotian —shire clutch at me because my father goes up to the Plantagenets for his pedigree—not one whit for myself—and neglect Ellinor; and only condescend to her father because old Wilkins was nobody-knows-who's son. So much the worse for them, but so much the better for me in this case. I'm above their silly antiquated prejudices, and shall be only too glad when the fitting time comes to make Ellinor my wife. After all, a prosperous attorney's daughter may not be considered an unsuitable match for me—younger son as I am. Ellinor will make a glorious woman three or four years hence; just the

style my father admires—such a figure, such limbs. I'll be patient, and bide my time, and watch my opportunities, and all will come right."

So he bade Ellinor farewell in a most reluctant and affectionate manner, although his words might have been spoken out in Hamley market-place, and were little different from what he said to Miss Monro. Mr. Wilkins half expected a disclosure to himself of the love which he suspected in the young man; and when that did not come, he prepared himself for a confidence from Ellinor. But she had nothing to tell him, as he very well perceived from the child's open unembarrassed manner when they were left alone together after dinner. He had refused an invitation, and shaken off Mr. Ness, in order to have this confidential *tête-à-tête* with his motherless girl; and there was nothing to make confidence of. He was half inclined to be angry; but then he saw that, although sad, she was so much at peace with herself and with the world, that he, always an optimist, began to think the young man had done wisely in not tearing open the rosebud of her feelings too prematurely.

The next two years passed over in much the same way—or a careless spectator might have thought so. I have heard people say, that if you look at a regiment advancing with steady step over a plain on a review-day, you can hardly tell that they are not merely marking time on one spot of ground, unless you compare their position with some other object by which to mark their progress, so even is the repetition of the movement. And thus the sad events of the future life of this father and daughter were hardly perceived in their steady advance, and yet over the monotony and flat uniformity of their days sorrow came marching down upon them like an armed man. Long before Mr. Wilkins had recognised its shape, it was approaching him in the distance—as, in fact, it is approaching all of us at this very time; you, reader, I, writer, have each our great sorrow bearing down upon us. It may be yet beyond the dimmest point of our horizon, but in the stillness of the night our hearts shrink at the sound of its coming footstep. Well is it for those who fall into the hands of the Lord rather than into the hands of men; but worst of all is it for him who has hereafter to mingle the gall of remorse with the cup held out to him by his doom.

Mr. Wilkins took his ease and his pleasure yet more and

more every year of his life; nor did the quality of his ease and his pleasure improve; it seldom does with self-indulgent people. He cared less for any books that strained his faculties a little—less for engravings and sculptures—perhaps more for pictures. He spent extravagantly on his horses; “thought of eating and drinking.” There was no open vice in all this, so that any awful temptation to crime should come down upon him, and startle him out of his mode of thinking and living; half the people about him did much the same, as far as their lives were patent to his unreflecting observation. But most of his associates had their duties to do, and did them with a heart and a will, in the hours when he was not in their company. Yes! I call them duties, though some of them might be self-imposed and purely social; they were engagements they had entered into, either tacitly or with words, and that they fulfilled. From Mr. Hetherington, the Master of the Hounds, who was up at—no one knows what hour, to go down to the kennel and see that the men did their work well and thoroughly, to stern old Sir Lionel Playfair, the upright magistrate, the thoughtful, conscientious landlord—they did their work according to their lights; there were few laggards among those with whom Mr. Wilkins associated in the field or at the dinner-table. Mr. Ness—though as a clergyman he was not so active as he might have been—yet even Mr. Ness fagged away with his pupils and his new edition of one of the classics. Only Mr. Wilkins, dissatisfied with his position, neglected to fulfil the duties thereof. He imitated the pleasures, and longed for the fancied leisure of those about him; leisure that he imagined would be so much more valuable in the hands of a man like himself, full of intellectual tastes and accomplishments, than frittered away by dull boors of untravelled, uncultivated squires—whose company, however, be it said by the way, he never refused.

And yet daily Mr. Wilkins was sinking from the intellectually to the sensually self-indulgent man. He lay late in bed, and hated Mr. Dunster for his significant glance at the office-clock when he announced to his master that such and such a client had been waiting more than an hour to keep an appointment. “Why didn’t you see him yourself, Dunster? I’m sure you would have done quite as well as me,” Mr. Wilkins sometimes replied, partly with a view of saying something pleasant to the

man whom he disliked and feared. Mr. Dunster always replied, in a meek matter-of-fact tone, "Oh, sir, they wouldn't like to talk over their affairs with a subordinate."

And every time he said this, or some speech of the same kind, the idea came more and more clearly into Mr. Wilkins's head, of how pleasant it would be to himself to take Dunster into partnership, and thus throw all the responsibility of the real work and drudgery upon his clerk's shoulders. Importunate clients, who would make appointments at unseasonable hours and would keep to them, might confide in the partner, though they would not in the clerk. The great objections to this course were, first and foremost, Mr. Wilkins's strong dislike to Mr. Dunster—his repugnance to his company, his dress, his voice, his ways—all of which irritated his employer, till his state of feeling towards Dunster might be called antipathy; next, Mr. Wilkins was fully aware of the fact that all Mr. Dunster's actions and words were carefully and thoughtfully pre-arranged to further the great unspoken desire of his life—that of being made a partner where he now was only a servant. Mr. Wilkins took a malicious pleasure in tantalising Mr. Dunster by such speeches as the one I have just mentioned, which always seemed like an opening to the desired end, but still for a long time never led any further. Yet all the while that end was becoming more and more certain, and at last it was reached.

Mr. Dunster always suspected that the final push was given by some circumstance from without; some reprimand for neglect—some threat of withdrawal of business which his employer had received; but of this he could not be certain; all he knew was, that Mr. Wilkins proposed the partnership to him in about as ungracious a way as such an offer could be made; an ungraciousness which, after all, had so little effect on the real matter in hand, that Mr. Dunster could pass over it with a private sneer, while taking all possible advantage of the tangible benefit it was now in his power to accept.

Mr. Corbet's attachment to Ellinor had been formally disclosed to her just before this time. He had left college, entered at the Middle Temple, and was fagging away at law, and feeling success in his own power; Ellinor was to "come out" at the next Hamley assemblies; and her lover began to be jealous of the possible admirers her striking appearance and

piquant conversation might attract, and thought it a good time to make the success of his suit certain by spoken words and promises.

He needed not have alarmed himself even enough to make him take this step, if he had been capable of understanding Ellinor's heart as fully as he did her appearance and conversation. She never missed the absence of formal words and promises. She considered herself as fully engaged to him, as much pledged to marry him and no one else, before he had asked the final question, as afterwards. She was rather surprised at the necessity for those decisive words—

"Ellinor, dearest, will you—can you marry me?" and her reply was—given with a deep blush I must record, and in a soft murmuring tone—

"Yes—oh, yes—I never thought of anything else."

"Then I may speak to your father, may not I, darling?"

"He knows; I am sure he knows; and he likes you so much. Oh, how happy I am!"

"But still I must speak to him before I go. When can I see him, my Ellinor? I must go back to town at four o'clock."

"I heard his voice in the stable-yard only just before you came. Let me go and find out if he is gone to the office yet."

No! to be sure he was not gone. He was quietly smoking a cigar in his study, sitting in an easy-chair near the open window, and leisurely glancing at all the advertisements in the *Times*. He hated going to the office more and more since Dunster had become a partner; that fellow gave himself such airs of investigation and reprehension.

He got up, took the cigar out of his mouth, and placed a chair for Mr. Corbet, knowing well why he had thus formally prefaced his entrance into the room with a—

"Can I have a few minutes' conversation with you, Mr. Wilkins?"

"Certainly, my dear fellow. Sit down. Will you have a cigar?"

"No! I never smoke." Mr. Corbet despised all these kinds of indulgences, and put a little severity into his refusal, but quite unintentionally; for though he was thankful he was not as other men, he was not at all the person to trouble himself unnecessarily with their reformation.

"I want to speak to you about Ellinor. She says she thinks you must be aware of our mutual attachment."

"Well," said Mr. Wilkins—he had resumed his cigar, partly to conceal his agitation at what he knew was coming—"I believe I have had my suspicions. It is not very long since I was young myself." And he sighed over the recollection of Lettice, and his fresh, hopeful youth.

"And I hope, sir, as you have been aware of it, and have never manifested any disapprobation of it, that you will not refuse your consent—a consent I now ask you for—to our marriage."

Mr. Wilkins did not speak for a little while—a touch, a thought, a word more would have brought him to tears; for at the last he found it hard to give the consent which would part him from his only child. Suddenly he got up, and putting his hand into that of the anxious lover (for his silence had rendered Mr. Corbet anxious up to a certain point of perplexity—he could not understand the implied he would and he would not), Mr. Wilkins said—

"Yes! God bless you both! I will give her to you, some day—only it must be a long time first. And now go away—go back to her—for I can't stand this much longer."

Mr. Corbet returned to Ellinor. Mr. Wilkins sat down and buried his head in his hands, then went to his stable, and had Wildfire saddled for a good gallop over the country. Mr. Dunster waited for him in vain at the office, where an obstinate old country gentleman from a distant part of the shire would ignore Dunster's existence as a partner, and pertinaciously demanded to see Mr. Wilkins on important business.



CHAPTER V.

A FEW days afterwards, Ellinor's father bethought himself that some further communication ought to take place between him and his daughter's lover regarding the approval of the family of the latter to the young man's engagement, and he accordingly wrote a very gentlemanly letter, saying that of course he trusted that Ralph had informed his father of his engagement; that Mr. Corbet was well known to Mr. Wilkins by reputation,

holding the position which he did in Shropshire, but that as Mr. Wilkins did not pretend to be in the same station of life, Mr. Corbet might possibly never even have heard of his name, although in his own county it was well known as having been for generations that of the principal conveyancer and land-agent of ——shire; that his wife had been a member of the old knightly family of Holsters, and that he himself was descended from a younger branch of the South Wales De Wintons, or Wilkins; that Ellinor, as his only child, would naturally inherit all his property, but that in the meantime, of course, some settlement upon her would be made, the nature of which might be decided nearer the time of the marriage.

It was a very good straightforward letter, and well fitted for the purpose to which Mr. Wilkins knew it would be applied —of being forwarded to the young man's father. One would have thought that it was not an engagement so disproportionate in point of station as to cause any great opposition on that score; but, unluckily, Captain Corbet, the heir and eldest son, had just formed a similar engagement with Lady Maria Brabant, the daughter of one of the proudest earls in ——shire, who had always resented Mr. Wilkins's appearance on the field as an insult to the county, and ignored his presence at every dinner-table where they met. Lady Maria was visiting the Corbets at the very time when Ralph's letter, enclosing Mr. Wilkins's, reached the paternal halls, and she merely repeated her father's opinions when Mrs. Corbet and her daughters naturally questioned her as to who these Wilkinsons were; they remembered the name in Ralph's letters formerly; the father was some friend of Mr. Ness's, the clergyman with whom Ralph had read; they believed Ralph used to dine with these Wilkinsons sometimes, along with Mr. Ness.

Lady Maria was a good-natured girl, and meant no harm in repeating her father's words; touched up, it is true, by some of the dislike she herself felt to the intimate alliance proposed, which would make her sister-in-law to the daughter of an "up-start attorney," "not received in the county," "always trying to push his way into the set above him," "claiming connection with the De Wintons of —— Castle, who, as she well knew, only laughed when he was spoken of, and said they were more rich in relations than they were aware of"—"not people papa would ever like her to know, whatever might be the family connection."

These little speeches told in a way which the girl who uttered them did not intend they should. Mrs. Corbet and her daughters set themselves violently against this foolish entanglement of Ralph's; they would not call it an engagement. They argued and they urged, and they pleaded, till the squire, anxious for peace at any price, and always more under the sway of the people who were with him, however unreasonable they might be, than of the absent, even though these had the wisdom of Solomon or the prudence and sagacity of his son Ralph, wrote an angry letter, saying that, as Ralph was of age, of course he had a right to please himself, therefore all his father could say was, that the engagement was not at all what either he or Ralph's mother had expected or hoped; that it was a degradation to the family just going to ally themselves with a peer of James the First's creation; that of course Ralph must do what he liked, but that if he married this girl he must never expect to have her received by the Corbets of Corbet Hall as a daughter. The squire was rather satisfied with his production, and took it to show it to his wife; but she did not think it was strong enough, and added a little post-script—

"DEAR RALPH,—Though, as second son, you are entitled to Bromley at my death, yet I can do much to make the estate worthless. Hitherto, regard for you has prevented my taking steps as to sale of timber, &c., which would materially increase your sisters' portions; this just measure I shall infallibly take if I find you persevere in keeping to this silly engagement. Your father's disapproval is always a sufficient reason to allege."

Ralph was annoyed at the receipt of these letters, though he only smiled as he locked them up in his desk.

"Dear old father; how he blusters! As to my mother, she is reasonable when I talk to her. Once give her a definite idea of what Ellinor's fortune will be, and let her, if she chooses, cut down her timber—a threat she has held over me ever since I knew what a rocking-horse was, and which I have known to be illegal these ten years past—and she'll come round. I know better than they do how Reginald has run up post-obits, and as for that vulgar

high-born Lady Maria they are all so full of, why, she is a Flanders mare to my Ellinor, and has not a silver penny to cross herself with, besides! I bide my time, you dear good people!"

He did not think it necessary to reply to these letters immediately, nor did he even allude to their contents in his to Ellinor. Mr. Wilkins, who had been very well satisfied with his own letter to the young man, and had thought that it must be equally agreeable to every one, was not at all suspicious of any disapproval, because the fact of a distinct sanction on the part of Mr. Ralph Corbet's friends to his engagement was not communicated to him.

As for Ellinor, she trembled all over with happiness. Such a summer for the blossoming of flowers and ripening of fruit had not been known for years; it seemed to her as if bountiful loving Nature wanted to fill the cup of Ellinor's joy to overflowing, and as if everything, animate and inanimate, sympathised with her happiness. Her father was well, and apparently content. Miss Monroe was very kind. Dixon's lameness was quite gone off. Only Mr. Dunster came creeping about the house, on pretence of business, seeking out her father, and disturbing all his leisure with his dust-coloured parchment-skinned careworn face, and seeming to disturb the smooth current of her daily life whenever she saw him.

Ellinor made her appearance at the Hamley assemblies, but with less *éclat* than either her father or her lover expected. Her beauty and natural grace were admired by those who could discriminate; but to the greater number there was (what they called) "a want of style"—want of elegance there certainly was not, for her figure was perfect, and though she moved shyly, she moved well. Perhaps it was not a good place for a correct appreciation of Miss Wilkins; some of the old dowagers thought it a piece of presumption in her to be there at all—but the Lady Holster of the day (who remembered her husband's quarrel with Mr. Wilkins, and looked away whenever Ellinor came near) resented this opinion. "Miss Wilkins is descended from Sir Frank's family, one of the oldest in the county; the objection might have been made years ago to the father, but as he had been received, she did not know why Miss Wilkins was to be alluded to as out of her place." Ellinor's greatest enjoyment in the evening was to hear her father say, after all was over, and they were driving home—

"Well, I thought my Nelly the prettiest girl there, and I think I know some other people who would have said the same if they could have spoken out."

"Thank you, papa," said Ellinor, squeezing his hand, which she held. She thought he alluded to the absent Ralph as the person who would have agreed with him, had he had the opportunity of seeing her; but no, he seldom thought much of the absent; but had been rather flattered by seeing Lord Hildebrand take up his glass for the apparent purpose of watching Ellinor.

"Your pearls, too, were as handsome as any in the room, child—but we must have them re-set; the sprays are old-fashioned now. Let me have them to-morrow to send up to Hancock."

"Papa, please, I had rather keep them as they are—as mamma wore them."

He was touched in a minute.

"Very well, darling. God bless you for thinking of it!"

But he ordered her a set of sapphires instead, for the next assembly.

These balls were not such as to intoxicate Ellinor with success, and make her in love with gaiety. Large parties came from the different country-houses in the neighbourhood, and danced with each other. When they had exhausted the resources they brought with them, they had generally a few dances to spare for friends of the same standing with whom they were most intimate. Ellinor came with her father, and joined an old card-playing dowager, by way of a chaperone—the said dowager being under old business obligations to the firm of Wilkins & Son, and apologising to all her acquaintances for her own weak condescension to Mr. Wilkins's foible in wishing to introduce his daughter into society above her natural sphere. It was upon this lady, after she had uttered some such speech as the one I have just mentioned, that Lady Holster had come down with the pedigree of Ellinor's mother. But though the old dowager had drawn back a little discomfited at my lady's reply, she was not more attentive to Ellinor in consequence. She allowed Mr. Wilkins to bring in his daughter and place her on the crimson sofa beside her; spoke to her occasionally in the interval that elapsed before the rubbers could be properly arranged in the card-room; invited the girl to

accompany her to that sober amusement, and on Ellinor's declining, and preferring to remain with her father, the dowager left her with a sweet smile on her plump countenance, and an approving conscience somewhere within her portly frame, assuring her that she had done all that could possibly have been expected from her towards "that good Wilkins's daughter." Ellinor stood by her father watching the dances, and thankful for the occasional chance of a dance. While she had been sitting by her chaperone, Mr. Wilkins had made the tour of the room, dropping out the little fact of his daughter's being present wherever he thought the seed likely to bring forth the fruit of partners. And some came because they liked Mr. Wilkins, and some asked Ellinor because they had done their duty dances to their own party, and might please themselves. So that she usually had an average of one invitation to every three dances; and this principally towards the end of the evening.

But considering her real beauty, and the care which her father always took about her appearance, she met with far less than her due of admiration. Admiration she did not care for; partners she did; and sometimes felt mortified when she had to sit or stand quiet during all the first part of the evening. If it had not been for her father's wishes she would much rather have stayed at home; but, nevertheless, she talked even to the irresponsible old dowager, and fairly chatted to her father when she got beside him, because she did not like him to fancy that she was not enjoying herself.

And, indeed, she had so much happiness in the daily course of this part of her life, that, on looking back upon it afterwards, she could not imagine anything brighter than it had been. The delight of receiving her lover's letters—the anxious happiness of replying to them (always a little bit fearful lest she should not express herself and her love in the precisely happy medium becoming a maiden)—the father's love and satisfaction in her—the calm prosperity of the whole household—was delightful at the time, and, looking back upon it, it was dreamlike.

Occasionally Mr. Corbet came down to see her. He always slept on these occasions at Mr. Ness's; but he was at Ford Bank the greater part of the one day between two nights that he allowed himself for the length of his visits. And even these

short peeps were not frequently taken. He was working hard at law : fagging at it tooth and nail ; arranging his whole life so as best to promote the ends of his ambition ; feeling a delight in surpassing and mastering his fellows—those who started in the race at the same time. He read Ellinor's letters over and over again ; nothing else besides law-books. He perceived the repressed love hidden away in subdued expressions in her communications, with an amused pleasure at the attempt at concealment. He was glad that her gaieties were not more gay ; he was glad that she was not too much admired, although a little indignant at the want of taste on the part of the —shire gentlemen. But if other admirers had come prominently forward, he would have had to take some more decided steps to assert his rights than he had hitherto done ; for he had caused Ellinor to express a wish to her father that her engagement should not be too much talked about until nearer the time when it would be prudent for him to marry her. He thought that the knowledge of this, the only imprudently hasty step he ever meant to take in his life, might go against his character for wisdom, if the fact became known while he was as yet only a student. Mr. Wilkins wondered a little ; but acceded, as he always did, to any of Ellinor's requests. Mr. Ness was a confidant, of course, and some of Lady Maria's connections heard of it, and forgot it again very soon ; and, as it happened, no one else was sufficiently interested in Ellinor to care to ascertain the fact.

All this time, Mr. Ralph Corbet maintained a very quietly decided attitude towards his own family. He was engaged to Miss Wilkins ; and all he could say was, he felt sorry that they disapproved of it. He was not able to marry just at present, and before the time for his marriage arrived he trusted that his family would take a more reasonable view of things, and be willing to receive her as his wife with all becoming respect or affection. This was the substance of what he repeated in different forms, in reply to his father's angry letters. At length, his invariable determination made way with his father ; the paternal thunderings were subdued to a distant rumbling in the sky ; and presently the inquiry was broached as to how much fortune Miss Wilkins would have ; how much down on her marriage ; what were the eventual probabilities. Now this was a point which Mr. Ralph Corbet himself wished to be informed

upon. He had not thought much about it in making the engagement ; he had been too young, or too much in love. But an only child of a wealthy attorney ought to have something considerable ; and an allowance so as to enable the young couple to start housekeeping in a moderately good part of town, would be an advantage to him in his profession. So he replied to his father, adroitly suggesting that a letter containing certain modifications of the inquiry which had been rather roughly put in Mr. Corbet's last, should be sent to him, in order that he might himself ascertain from Mr. Wilkins what were Ellinor's prospects as regarded fortune.

The desired letter came ; but not in such a form that he could pass it on to Mr. Wilkins ; he preferred to make quotations, and even these quotations were a little altered and dressed before he sent them on. The gist of his letter to Mr. Wilkins was this. He stated that he hoped soon to be in a position to offer Ellinor a home ; that he anticipated a steady progress in his profession, and consequently in his income ; but that contingencies might arise, as his father suggested, which would deprive him of the power of earning a livelihood, perhaps when it might be more required than it would be at first ; that it was true that, after his mother's death, a small estate in Shropshire would come to him as second son, and of course Ellinor would receive the benefit of this property, secured to her legally as Mr. Wilkins thought best—that being a matter for after discussion—but that at present his father was anxious, as might be seen from the extract, to ascertain whether Mr. Wilkins could secure him from the contingency of having his son's widow and possible children thrown upon his hands, by giving Ellinor a dowry ; and if so, it was gently insinuated, what would be the amount of the same.

When Mr. Wilkins received this letter it startled him out of a happy day-dream. He liked Ralph Corbet and the whole connection quite well enough to give his consent to an engagement ; and sometimes even he was glad to think that Ellinor's future was assured, and that she would have a protector and friends after he was dead and gone. But he did not want them to assume their responsibilities so soon. He had not distinctly contemplated her marriage as an event likely to happen before his death. He could not understand how his own life would go on without her : or indeed why she and Ralph Corbet could not continue just as they were at present. He came down to break-

fast with the letter in his hand. By Ellinor's blushes, as she glanced at the handwriting, he knew that she had heard from her lover by the same post; by her tender caresses—caresses given as if to make up for the pain which the prospect of her leaving him was sure to cause him—he was certain that she was aware of the contents of the letter. Yet he put it in his pocket, and tried to forget it.

He did this not merely from his reluctance to complete any arrangements which might facilitate Ellinor's marriage. There was a further annoyance connected with the affair. His money matters had been for some time in an involved state; he had been living beyond his income, even reckoning that, as he always did, at the highest point which it ever touched. He kept no regular accounts, reasoning with himself—or, perhaps, I should rather say persuading himself—that there was no great occasion for regular accounts, when he had a steady income arising from his profession, as well as the interest of a good sum of money left him by his father; and when, living in his own house near a country town where provisions were cheap, his expenditure for his small family—only one child—could never amount to anything like his incomings from the above-mentioned sources. But servants and horses, and choice wines and rare fruit-trees, and a habit of purchasing any book or engraving that may take the fancy, irrespective of the price, run away with money, even though there be but one child. A year or two ago, Mr. Wilkins had been startled into a system of exaggerated retrenchment—retrenchment which only lasted about six weeks—by the sudden bursting of a bubble speculation in which he had invested a part of his father's savings. But as soon as the change in his habits, necessitated by his new economies, became irksome, he had comforted himself for his relapse into his former easy extravagance of living by remembering the fact that Ellinor was engaged to the son of a man of large property: and that though Ralph was only the second son, yet his mother's estate must come to him, as Mr. Ness had already mentioned, on first hearing of her engagement.

Mr. Wilkins did not doubt that he could easily make Ellinor a fitting allowance, or even pay down a requisite dowry; but the doing so would involve an examination into the real state of his affairs, and this involved distasteful trouble. He had no idea how much more than mere temporary annoyance would

arise out of the investigation. Until it was made, he decided in his own mind that he would not speak to Ellinor on the subject of her lover's letter. So for the next few days she was kept in suspense, seeing little of her father; and during the short times she was with him she was made aware that he was nervously anxious to keep the conversation engaged on general topics rather than on the one which she had at heart. As I have already said, Mr. Corbet had written to her by the same post as that on which he sent the letter to her father, telling her of its contents, and begging her (in all those sweet words which lovers know how to use) to urge her father to compliance for his sake—his, her lover's—who was pining and lonely in all the crowds of London, since her loved presence was not there. He did not care for money, save as a means of hastening their marriage; indeed, if there were only some income fixed, however small—some time for their marriage fixed, however distant—he could be patient. He did not want superfluity of wealth; his habits were simple, as she well knew; and money enough would be theirs in time, both from her share of contingencies, and the certainty of his finally possessing Bromley.

Ellinor delayed replying to this letter until her father should have spoken to her on the subject. But as she perceived that he avoided all such conversation, the young girl's heart failed her. She began to blame herself for wishing to leave him, to reproach herself for being accessory to any step which made him shun being alone with her, and look distressed and full of care as he did now. It was the usual struggle between father and lover for the possession of love, instead of the natural and graceful resignation of the parent to the prescribed course of things; and, as usual, it was the poor girl who bore the suffering for no fault of her own: although she blamed herself for being the cause of the disturbance in the previous order of affairs. Ellinor had no one to speak to confidentially but her father and her lover, and when they were at issue she could talk openly to neither, so she brooded over Mr. Corbet's unanswered letter, and her father's silence, and became pale and dispirited. Once or twice she looked up suddenly, and caught her father's eye gazing upon her with a certain wistful anxiety; but the instant she saw this he pulled himself up, as it were, and would begin talking gaily about the small topics of the day.

At length Mr. Corbet grew impatient at not hearing either

from Mr. Wilkins or Ellinor, and wrote urgently to the former, making known to him a new proposal suggested to him by his father, which was, that a certain sum should be paid down by Mr. Wilkins, to be applied, under the management of trustees, to the improvement of the Bromley estate, out of the profits of which, or other sources in the elder Mr. Corbet's hands, a heavy rate of interest should be paid on this advance, which would secure an income to the young couple immediately, and considerably increase the value of the estate upon which Ellinor's settlement was to be made. The terms offered for this laying down of ready money were so advantageous, that Mr. Wilkins was strongly tempted to accede to them at once; as Ellinor's pale cheek and want of appetite had only that very morning smote upon his conscience, and this immediate transfer of ready money was as a sacrifice, a soothing balm to his self-reproach, and laziness and dislike to immediate unpleasantness of action had its counterbalancing weakness in imprudence. Mr. Wilkins made some rough calculations on a piece of paper—deeds, and all such tests of accuracy, being down at the office; discovered that he could pay down the sum required; wrote a letter agreeing to the proposal, and before he sealed it called Ellinor into his study, and bade her read what he had been writing and tell him what she thought of it. He watched the colour come rushing into her white face, her lips quiver and tremble, and even before the letter was ended she was in his arms kissing him, and thanking him with blushing caresses rather than words.

"There, there!" said he, smiling and sighing; "that will do. Why, I do believe you took me for a hard-hearted father, just like a heroine's father in a book. You've looked as woe-begone this week past as Ophelia. One can't make up one's mind in a day about such sums of money as this, little woman; and you should have let your old father have time to consider."

"Oh, papa; I was only afraid you were angry."

"Well, if I was a bit perplexed, seeing you look so ill and pining was not the way to bring me round. Old Corbet, I must say, is trying to make a good bargain for his son. It is well for me that I have never been an extravagant man."

"But, papa, we don't want all this much."

"Yes, yes! it is all right. You shall go into their family as a well-portioned girl, if you can't go as a Lady Maria. Come, don't trouble your little head any more about it. Give me one

more kiss, and then we'll go and order the horses, and have a ride together, by way of keeping holiday. I deserve a holiday, don't I, Nelly?"

Some country people at work at the roadside, as the father and daughter passed along, stopped to admire their bright happy looks, and one spoke of the hereditary handsomeness of the Wilkins family (for the old man, the present Mr. Wilkins's father, had been fine-looking in his drab breeches and gaiters, and usual assumption of a yeoman's dress). Another said it was easy for the rich to be handsome; they had always plenty to eat, and could ride when they were tired of walking, and had no care for the morrow to keep them from sleeping at nights. And, in sad acquiescence with their contrasted lot, the men went on with their hedging and ditching in silence.

And yet, if they had known—if the poor did know—the troubles and temptations of the rich; if those men had foreseen the lot darkening over the father, and including the daughter in its cloud; if Mr. Wilkins himself had even imagined such a future possible. . . . Well, there was truth in the old heathen saying, "Let no man be envied till his death."

Ellinor had no more rides with her father; no, not ever again; though they had stopped that afternoon at the summit of a breezy common, and looked at a ruined hall, not so very far off, and discussed whether they could reach it that day, and decided that it was too far away for anything but a hurried inspection, and that some day soon they would make the old place into the principal object of an excursion. But a rainy time came on, when no rides were possible; and whether it was the influence of the weather, or some other care or trouble that oppressed him, Mr. Wilkins seemed to lose all wish for much active exercise, and rather sought a stimulus to his spirits and circulation in wine. But of this Ellinor was innocently unaware. He seemed dull and weary, and sat long, drowsing and drinking after dinner. If the servants had not been so fond of him for much previous generosity and kindness, they would have complained now, and with reason, of his irritability, for all sorts of things seemed to annoy him.

"You should get the master to take a ride with you, miss," said Dixon one day, as he was putting Ellinor on her horse. "He's not looking well. He's studying too much at the office."

But when Ellinor named it to her father, he rather hastily replied that it was all very well for women to ride out whenever they liked—men had something else to do; and then, as he saw her look grave and puzzled, he softened down his abrupt saying by adding that Dunster had been making a fuss about his partner's non-attendance, and altogether taking a good deal upon himself in a very offensive way, so that he thought it better to go pretty regularly to the office, in order to show him who was master—senior partner, and head of the business, at any rate.

Ellinor sighed a little over her disappointment at her father's preoccupation, and then forgot her own little regret in anger at Mr. Dunster, who had seemed all along to be a thorn in her father's side, and had latterly gained some power and authority over him, the exercise of which, Ellinor could not help thinking, was a very impertinent line of conduct from a junior partner, so lately only a paid clerk, to his superior. There was a sense of something wrong in the Ford Bank household for many weeks about this time. Mr. Wilkins was not like himself, and his cheerful ways and careless genial speeches were missed, even on the days when he was not irritable, and evidently uneasy with himself and all about him. The spring was late in coming, and cold rain and sleet made any kind of outdoor exercise a trouble and discomfort rather than a bright natural event in the course of the day. All sound of winter gaieties, of assemblies and meets, and jovial dinners, had died away, and the summer pleasures were as yet unthought of. Still Ellinor had a secret perennial source of sunshine in her heart; whenever she thought of Ralph she could not feel much oppression from the present unspoken and indistinct gloom. He loved her; and oh, how she loved him! and perhaps this very next autumn—but that depended on his own success in his profession. After all, if it was not this autumn it would be the next; and with the letters that she received weekly, and the occasional visits that her lover ran down to Hamley to pay Mr. Ness, Ellinor felt as if she would almost prefer the delay of the time when she must leave her father's for a husband's roof.

CHAPTER VI.

AT Easter—just when the heavens and earth were looking their dreariest, for Easter fell very early this year—Mr. Corbet came down. Mr. Wilkins was too busy to see much of him; they were together even less than usual, although not less friendly when they did meet. But to Ellinor the visit was one of unmixed happiness. Hitherto she had always had a little fear mingled up with her love of Mr. Corbet; but his manners were softened, his opinions less decided and abrupt, and his whole treatment of her showed such tenderness, that the young girl basked and revelled in it. One or two of their conversations had reference to their future married life in London; and she then perceived, although it did not jar against her, that her lover had not forgotten his ambition in his love. He tried to inoculate her with something of his own craving for success in life; but it was all in vain: she nestled to him, and told him she did not care to be the Lord Chancellor's wife—wigs and woolsocks were not in her line; only if he wished it, she would wish it.

The last two days of his stay the weather changed. Sudden heat burst forth, as it does occasionally for a few hours even in our chilly English spring. The grey-brown bushes and trees started almost with visible progress into the tender green shade which is the forerunner of the bursting leaves. The sky was of full cloudless blue. Mr. Wilkins was to come home pretty early from the office to ride out with his daughter and her lover; but, after waiting some time for him, it grew too late, and they were obliged to give up the project. Nothing would serve Ellinor, then, but that she must carry out a table and have tea in the garden, on the sunny side of the tree, among the roots of which she used to play when a child. Miss Monro objected a little to this caprice of Ellinor's, saying that it was too early for out-of-door meals; but Mr. Corbet overruled all objections, and helped her in her gay preparations. She always kept to the early hours of her childhood, although she, as then, regularly sat with her father at his late dinner; and this meal *al fresco* was to be a reality to her and Miss Monro. There was a place arranged for her father, and she seized upon him as he was coming from

the stable-yard, by the shrubbery path, to his study, and with merry playfulness made him a prisoner, accusing him of disappointing them of their ride, and drawing him, more than half unwilling, to his chair by the table. But he was silent, and almost sad: his presence damped them all; they could hardly tell why, for he did not object to anything, though he seemed to enjoy nothing, and only to force a smile at Ellinor's occasional sallies. These became more and more rare as she perceived her father's depression. She watched him anxiously. He perceived it, and said—shivering in that strange unaccountable manner which is popularly explained by the expression that some one is passing over the earth that will one day form your grave—

“Ellinor! this is not a day for out-of-door tea. I never felt so chilly a spot in my life. I cannot keep from shaking where I sit. I must leave this place, my dear, in spite of all your good tea.”

“Oh, papa! I am so sorry. But look how full that hot sun's rays come on this turf. I thought I had chosen such a capital spot!”

But he got up and persisted in leaving the table, although he was evidently sorry to spoil the little party. He walked up and down the gravel walk, close by them, talking to them as he kept passing by and trying to cheer them up.

“Are you warmer now, papa?” asked Ellinor.

“Oh, yes! all right. It's only that place that seems so chilly and damp. I'm as warm as a toast now.”

The next morning Mr. Corbet left them. The unseasonably fine weather passed away too, and all things went back to their rather grey and dreary aspect; but Ellinor was too happy to feel this much, knowing what absent love existed for her alone, and from this knowledge unconsciously trusting in the sun behind the clouds.

I have said that few or none in the immediate neighbourhood of Hamley, beside their own household and Mr. Ness, knew of Ellinor's engagement. At one of the rare dinner-parties to which she accompanied her father—it was at the old lady's house who chaperoned her to the assemblies—she was taken in to dinner by a young clergyman staying in the neighbourhood. He had just had a small living given to him in his own county, and he felt as if this was a great step in his life. He was good, innocent, and

rather boyish in appearance. Ellinor was happy and at her ease, and chatted away to this Mr. Livingstone on many little points of interest which they found they had in common : church music, and the difficulty they had in getting people to sing in parts ; Salisbury Cathedral, which they had both seen ; styles of church architecture, Ruskin's works, and parish schools, in which Mr. Livingstone was somewhat shocked to find that Ellinor took no great interest. When the gentlemen came in from the dining-room, it struck Ellinor, for the first time in her life, that her father had taken more wine than was good for him. Indeed, this had rather become a habit with him of late ; but as he always tried to go quietly off to his own room when such had been the case, his daughter had never been aware of it before, and the perception of it now made her cheeks hot with shame. She thought that every one must be as conscious of his altered manner and way of speaking as she was, and after a pause of sick silence, during which she could not say a word, she set to and talked to Mr. Livingstone about parish schools, anything, with redoubled vigour and apparent interest, in order to keep one or two of the company, at least, from noticing what was to her so painfully obvious.

The effect of her behaviour was far more than she had intended. She kept Mr. Livingstone, it is true, from observing her father, but she also riveted his attention on herself. He had thought her very pretty and agreeable during dinner : but after dinner he considered her bewitching, irresistible. He dreamed of her all night, and wakened up the next morning to a calculation of how far his income would allow him to furnish his pretty new parsonage with that crowning blessing, a wife. For a day or two he did up little sums, and sighed, and thought of Ellinor, her face listening with admiring interest to his sermons, her arm passed into his as they went together round the parish ; her sweet voice instructing classes in his schools—turn where he would, in his imagination Ellinor's presence rose up before him.

The consequence was that he wrote an offer, which he found a far more perplexing piece of composition than a sermon ; a real hearty expression of love, going on, over all obstacles, to a straightforward explanation of his present prospects and future hopes, and winding up with the information that on the succeeding morning he would call to know whether he might speak to Mr. Wilkins on the subject of this letter. It was given to Ellinor

in the evening, as she was sitting with Miss Monro in the library. Mr. Wilkins was dining out, she hardly knew where, as it was a sudden engagement, of which he had sent word from the office—a gentleman's dinner-party, she supposed, as he had dressed in Hamley without coming home. Ellinor turned over the letter when it was brought to her, as some people do when they cannot recognise the handwriting, as if to discover from paper or seal what two moments would assure them of, if they opened the letter and looked at the signature. Ellinor could not guess who had written it by any outward sign; but the moment she saw the name "Herbert Livingstone," the meaning of the letter flashed upon her and she coloured all over. She put the letter away, unread, for a few minutes, and then made some excuse for leaving the room and going upstairs. When safe in her bedchamber, she read the young man's eager words with a sense of self-reproach. How must she, engaged to one man, have been behaving to another, if this was the result of a single evening's interview? The self-reproach was unjustly bestowed; but with that we have nothing to do. She made herself very miserable; and at last went down with a heavy heart to go on with Dante, and rummage up words in the dictionary. All the time she seemed to Miss Monro to be plodding on with her Italian more diligently and sedately than usual, she was planning in her own mind to speak to her father as soon as he returned (and he had said that he should not be late), and beg him to undo the mischief she had done by seeing Mr. Livingstone the next morning, and frankly explaining the real state of affairs to him. But she wanted to read her letter again, and think it all over in peace; and so, at an early hour, she wished Miss Monro good-night, and went up into her own room above the drawing-room, and overlooking the flower-garden and shrubbery-path to the stable-yard, by which her father was sure to return. She went upstairs and studied her letter well, and tried to recall all her speeches and conduct on that miserable evening—as she thought it then—not knowing what true misery was. Her head ached, and she put out the candle, and went and sat on the window-seat, looking out into the moonlit garden, watching for her father. She opened the window; partly to cool her forehead, partly to enable her to call down softly when she should see him coming along. By-and-by the door from the stable-yard into the shrubbery clicked and opened, and in a moment she saw Mr.

Wilkins moving through the bushes ; but not alone, Mr. Dunster was with him, and the two were talking together in rather excited tones, immediately lost to hearing, however, as they entered Mr. Wilkins's study by the outer door.

"They have been dining together somewhere. Probably at Mr. Hanbury's" (the Hamley brewer), thought Ellinor. "But how provoking that he should have come home with papa this night of all nights !"

Two or three times before Mr. Dunster had called on Mr. Wilkins in the evening, as Ellinor knew ; but she was not quite aware of the reason for such late visits, and had never put together the two facts—as cause and consequence—that on such occasions her father had been absent from the office all day, and that there might be necessary business for him to transact, the urgency of which was the motive for Mr. Dunster's visits. Mr. Wilkins always seemed to be annoyed by his coming at so late an hour, and spoke of it, resenting the intrusion upon his leisure ; and Ellinor, without consideration, adopted her father's mode of speaking and thinking on the subject, and was rather more angry than he was whenever the obnoxious partner came on business in the evening. This night was, of all nights, the most ill-purposed time (so Ellinor thought) for a *tête-à-tête* with her father ! However, there was no doubt in her mind as to what she had to do. So late as it was, the unwelcome visitor could not stop long ; and then she would go down and have her little confidence with her father, and beg him to see Mr. Livingstone when he came next morning, and dismiss him as gently as might be.

She sat on in the window-seat ; dreaming waking dreams of future happiness. She kept losing herself in such thoughts, and became almost afraid of forgetting why she sat there. Presently she felt cold, and got up to fetch a shawl, in which she muffled herself and resumed her place. It seemed to her growing very late ; the moonlight was coming fuller and fuller into the garden and the blackness of the shadow was more concentrated and stronger. Surely Mr. Dunster could not have gone away along the dark shrubbery-path so noiselessly but what she must have heard him ? No ! there was the swell of voices coming up through the window from her father's study : angry voices they were ; and her anger rose sympathetically, as she knew that her father was

being irritated. There was a sudden movement, as of chairs pushed hastily aside, and then a mysterious unaccountable noise—heavy, sudden; and then a slight movement as of chairs again; and then a profound stillness. Ellinor leaned her head against the side of the window to listen more intently, for some mysterious instinct made her sick and faint. No sound—no noise. Only by-and-by she heard, what we have all heard at such times of intent listening, the beating of the pulses of her heart, and then the whirling rush of blood through her head. How long did this last? She never knew. By-and-by she heard her father's hurried footstep in his bedroom, next to hers; but when she ran thither to speak to him, and ask him what was amiss—if anything had been—if she might come to him now about Mr. Livingstone's letter, she found that he had gone down again to his study, and almost at the same moment she heard the little private outer door of that room open; some one went out, and then there were hurried footsteps along the shrubbery-path. She thought, of course, that it was Mr. Dunster leaving the house; and went back for Mr. Livingstone's letter. Having found it, she passed through her father's room to the private staircase, thinking that if she went by the more regular way, she would have run the risk of disturbing Miss Monro, and perhaps of being questioned in the morning. Even in passing down this remote staircase, she trod softly for fear of being overheard. When she entered the room, the full light of the candles dazzled her for an instant, coming out of the darkness. They were flaring wildly in the draught that came in through the open door, by which the outer air was admitted; for a moment there seemed no one in the room, and then she saw, with strange sick horror, the legs of some one lying on the carpet behind the table. As if compelled, even while she shrank from doing it, she went round to see who it was that lay there so still and motionless as never to stir at her sudden coming. It was Mr. Dunster; his head propped on chair-cushions, his eyes open, staring, distended. There was a strong smell of brandy and hartshorn in the room; a smell so powerful as not to be neutralised by the free current of night air that blew through the two open doors. Ellinor could not have told whether it was reason or instinct that made her act as she did during this awful night. In thinking of it afterwards, with shuddering avoidance of the haunting

memory that would come and overshadow her during many, many years of her life, she grew to believe that the powerful smell of the spilt brandy absolutely intoxicated her—an unconscious Rechabite in practice. But something gave her a presence of mind and a courage not her own. And though she learnt to think afterwards that she had acted unwisely, if not wrongly and wickedly, yet she marvelled, in recalling that time, how she could have then behaved as she did. First of all she lifted herself up from her fascinated gaze at the dead man, and went to the staircase door, by which she had entered the study, and shut it softly. Then she went back—looked again; took the brandy-bottle, and knelt down, and tried to pour some into the mouth; but this she found she could not do. Then she wetted her handkerchief with the spirit, and moistened the lips; all to no purpose; for, as I have said before, the man was dead—killed by rupture of a vessel of the brain; how occasioned I must tell by-and-by. Of course, all Ellinor's little cares and efforts produced no effect; her father had tried them before—vain endeavours all, to bring back the precious breath of life! The poor girl could not bear the look of those open eyes, and softly, tenderly, tried to close them, although unconscious that in so doing she was rendering the pious offices of some beloved hand to a dead man. She was sitting by the body on the floor when she heard steps coming with rushing and yet cautious tread, through the shrubbery; she had no fear, although it might be the tread of robbers and murderers. The awfulness of the hour raised her above common fears; though she did not go through the usual process of reasoning, and by it feel assured that the feet which were coming so softly and swiftly along were the same which she had heard leaving the room in like manner only a quarter of an hour before.

Her father entered, and started back, almost upsetting some one behind him by his recoil, on seeing his daughter in her motionless attitude by the dead man.

"My God, Ellinor! what has brought you here?" he said, almost fiercely.

But she answered as one stupefied—

"I don't know. Is he dead?"

"Hush, hush, child; it cannot be helped."

She raised her eyes to the solemn, pitying, awe-stricken face behind her father's—the countenance of Dixon.

"Is he dead?" she asked of him.

The man stepped forwards, respectfully pushing his master on one side as he did so. He bent down over the corpse, and looked, and listened, and then reaching a candle off the table, he signed Mr. Wilkins to close the door. And Mr. Wilkins obeyed, and looked with an intensity of eagerness almost amounting to faintness on the experiment, and yet he could not hope. The flame was steady—steady and pitilessly unshaken, even when it was adjusted close to mouth and nostril; the head was raised up by one of Dixon's stalwart arms, while he held the candle in the other hand. Ellinor fancied that there was some trembling on Dixon's part, and grasped his wrist tightly in order to give it the requisite motionless firmness.

All in vain. The head was placed again on the cushions, the servant rose and stood by his master, looked sadly on the dead man, whom, living, none of them had liked or cared for, and Ellinor sat on, quiet and tearless, as one in a trance.

"How was it, father?" at length she asked.

He would fain have had her ignorant of all, but so questioned by her lips, so adjured by her eyes, in the very presence of death, he could not choose but speak the truth; he spoke it in convulsive gasps, each sentence an effort—

"He taunted me—he was insolent, beyond my patience—I could not bear it. I struck him—I can't tell how it was. He must have hit his head in falling. Oh, my God! one little hour ago I was innocent of this man's blood!" He covered his face with his hands.

Ellinor took the candle again; kneeling behind Mr. Dunster's head she tried the futile experiment once more.

"Could not a doctor do some good?" she asked of Dixon, in a hopeless voice.

"No!" said he, shaking his head, and looking with a side-long glance at his master, who seemed to shrivel up and to shrink away at the bare suggestion. "Doctors can do nought, I'm afeard. All that a doctor could do, I take it, would be to open a vein, and that I could do along with the best of them, if I had but my fleam here." He fumbled in his pockets as he spoke, and, as chance would have it, the "fleam" (or cattle lancet) was somewhere about his dress. He drew it out, smoothed and tried it on his finger. Ellinor tried to bare the arm, but turned sick as she did so. Her father started eagerly forwards, and did

what was necessary with hurried trembling hands. If they had cared less about the result, they might have been more afraid of the consequences of the operation in the hands of one so ignorant as Dixon. But, vein or artery, it signified little; no living blood gushed out; only a little watery moisture followed the cut of the fleam. They laid him back on his strange sad death-couch. Dixon spoke next.

"Master Ned!" said he—for he had known Mr. Wilkins in his days of bright careless boyhood, and almost was carried back to them by the sense of charge and protection which the servant's presence of mind and sharpened senses gave him over his master on this dreary night—"Master Ned! we must do summut."

No one spoke. What was to be done?

"Did any folk see him come here?" Dixon asked, after a time. Ellinor looked up to hear her father's answer, a wild hope coming into her mind that all might be concealed somehow; she did not know how, nor did she think of any consequences except saving her father from the vague dread, trouble, and punishment that she was aware would await him if all were known.

Mr. Wilkins did not seem to hear; in fact, he did not hear anything but the unspoken echo of his own last words, that went booming through his heart: "An hour ago I was innocent of this man's blood! Only an hour ago!"

Dixon got up and poured out half a tumblerful of raw spirit from the brandy-bottle that stood on the table.

"Drink this, Master Ned!" putting it to his master's lips. "Nay"—to Ellinor—"it will do him no harm; only bring back his senses, which, poor gentleman, are scared away. We shall need all our wits. Now, sir, please answer my question. Did any one see Measter Dunster come here?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Wilkins, recovering his speech. "It all seems in a mist. He offered to walk home with me; I did not want him. I was almost rude to him to keep him off. I did not want to talk of business; I had taken too much wine to be very clear, and some things at the office were not quite in order, and he had found it out. If any one heard our conversation, they must know I did not want him to come with me. Oh! why would he come! He was as obstinate—he would come—and here it has been his death!"

"Well, sir, what's done can't be undone, and I'm sure we'd

any of us bring him back to life if we could, even by cutting off our hands, though he was a mighty plaguey chap while he'd breath in him. But what I'm thinking is this: it'll maybe go awkward with you, sir, if he's found here. One can't say. But don't you think, miss, as he's neither kith nor kin to miss him, we might just bury him away before morning, somewhere? There's better nor four hours of dark. I wish we could put him i' the churchyard, but that can't be; but, to my mind, the sooner we set about digging a place for him to lie in, poor fellow, the better it'll be for us all in the end. I can pare a piece of turf up where it'll never be missed, and if master 'll take one spade, and I another, why, we'll lay him softly down, and cover him up, and no one 'll be the wiser."

There was no reply from either for a minute or so. Then Mr. Wilkins said—

"If my father could have known of my living to this! Why, they will try me as a criminal; and you, Ellinor? Dixon, you are right. We must conceal it, or I must cut my throat, for I never could live through it. One minute of passion, and my life blasted!"

"Come along, sir," said Dixon; "there's no time to lose." And they went out in search of tools; Ellinor following them, shivering all over, but begging that she might be with them, and not have to remain in the study with—

She would not be bidden into her own room; she dreaded inaction and solitude. She made herself busy with carrying heavy baskets of turf, and straining her strength to the utmost; fetching all that was wanted, with soft swift steps.

Once, as she passed near the open study door, she thought that she heard a rustling, and a flash of hope came across her. Could he be reviving? She entered, but a moment was enough to undeceive her; it had only been a night rustle among the trees. Of hope, life, there was none.

They dug the hole deep and well; working with fierce energy to quench thought and remorse. Once or twice her father asked for brandy, which Ellinor, reassured by the apparently good effect of the first dose, brought to him without a word; and once at her father's suggestion she brought food, such as she could find in the dining-room without disturbing the household, for Dixon.

When all was ready for the reception of the body in its un-

blessed grave, Mr. Wilkins bade Ellinor go up to her own room—she had done all she could to help them; the rest must be done by them alone. She felt that it must; and indeed both her nerves and her bodily strength were giving way. She would have kissed her father, as he sat wearily at the head of the grave—Dixon had gone in to make some arrangement for carrying the corpse—but he pushed her away quietly, but resolutely—

“No, Nelly, you must never kiss me again; I am a murderer.”

“But I will, my own darling papa,” said she, throwing her arms passionately round his neck, and covering his face with kisses. “I love you, and I don’t care what you are, if you were twenty times a murderer, which you are not; I am sure it was only an accident.”

“Go in, my child, go in, and try to get some rest. But go in, for we must finish as fast as we can. The moon is down; it will soon be daylight. What a blessing there are no rooms on one side of the house. Go, Nelly.” And she went; straining herself up to move noiselessly, with eyes averted, through the room which she shuddered at as the place of hasty and unhallowed death.

Once in her own room she bolted the door on the inside, and then stole to the window, as if some fascination impelled her to watch all the proceedings to the end. But her aching eyes could hardly penetrate through the thick darkness, which at the time of the year of which I am speaking, so closely precedes the dawn. She could discern the tops of the trees against the sky, and could single out the well-known one, at a little distance from the stem of which the grave was made, in the very piece of turf over which so lately she and Ralph had had their merry little tea-making; and where her father, as she now remembered, had shuddered and shivered, as if the ground on which his seat had then been placed was fateful and ominous to him.

Those below moved softly and quietly in all they did; but every sound had a significant and terrible interpretation to Ellinor’s ears. Before they had ended, the little birds had begun to pipe out their gay *reveille* to the dawn. Then doors closed, and all was profoundly still.

Ellinor threw herself, in her clothes, on the bed; and was thankful for the intense weary physical pain which took off

something of the anguish of thought—anguish that she fancied from time to time was leading to insanity.

By-and-by the morning cold made her instinctively creep between the blankets; and, once there, she fell into a dead heavy sleep.



CHAPTER VII.

ELLINOR was awakened by a rapping at her door: it was her maid.

She was fully aroused in a moment, for she had fallen asleep with one clearly defined plan in her mind, only one, for all thoughts and cares having no relation to the terrible event were as though they had never been. All her purpose was to shield her father from suspicion. And to do this she must control herself—heart, mind, and body must be ruled to this one end.

So she said to Mason—

“Let me lie half-an-hour longer; and beg Miss Monro not to wait breakfast for me; but in half-an-hour bring me up a cup of strong tea, for I have a bad headache.”

Mason went away. Ellinor sprang up; rapidly undressed herself, and got into bed again, so that when her maid returned with her breakfast, there was no appearance of the night having been passed in any unusual manner.

“How ill you do look, miss!” said Mason. “I am sure you had better not get up yet.”

Ellinor longed to ask if her father had yet shown himself; but this question—so natural at any other time—seemed to her so suspicious under the circumstances, that she could not bring her lips to frame it. At any rate, she must get up and struggle to make the day like all other days. So she rose, confessing that she did not feel very well, but trying to make light of it, and when she could think of anything but the one awe, to say a trivial sentence or two. But she could not recollect how she behaved in general, for her life hitherto had been simple, and led without any consciousness of effect.

Before she was dressed, a message came up to say that Mr. Livingstone was in the drawing-room.

Mr. Livingstone! He belonged to the old life of yesterday! The billows of the night had swept over his mark on the sands

of her memory ; and it was only by a strong effort that she could remember who he was—what he wanted. She sent Mason down to inquire from the servant who admitted him whom it was that he had asked for.

“ He asked for master first. But master has not rung for his water yet, so James told him he was not up. Then he took thought for a while, and asked could he speak to you, he would wait if you were not at liberty ; but that he wished particular to see either master, or you. So James asked him to sit down in the drawing-room, and he would let you know.”

“ I must go,” thought Ellinor. “ I will send him away directly ; to come, thinking of marriage, to a house like this—to-day, too !”

And she went down hastily, and in a hard unsparing mood towards a man, whose affection for her she thought was like a gourd, grown up in a night, and of no account, but as a piece of foolish, boyish excitement.

She never thought of her own appearance—she had dressed without looking in the glass. Her only object was to dismiss her would-be suitor as speedily as possible. All feelings of shyness, awkwardness, or maiden modesty, were quenched and overcome. In she went.

He was standing by the mantelpiece as she entered. He made a step or two forward to meet her ; and then stopped, petrified, as it were, at the sight of her hard white face.

“ Miss Wilkins, I am afraid you are ill ! I have come too early. But I have to leave Hamley in half-an-hour, and I thought— Oh, Miss Wilkins ! what have I done ?”

For she sank into the chair nearest to her, as if overcome by his words ; but indeed, it was by the oppression of her own thoughts : she was hardly conscious of his presence.

He came a step or two nearer, as if he longed to take her in his arms and comfort and shelter her ; but she stiffened herself and arose, and by an effort walked towards the fireplace, and there stood, as if awaiting what he would say next. But he was overwhelmed by her aspect of illness. He almost forgot his own wishes, his own suit, in his desire to relieve her from the pain, physical as he believed it, under which she was suffering. It was she who had to begin the subject.

“ I received your letter yesterday, Mr. Livingstone. I was anxious to see you to-day, in order that I might prevent you

from speaking to my father. I do not say anything of the kind of affection you can feel for me—me, whom you have only seen once. All I shall say is, that the sooner we both forget what I must call folly, the better.”

She took the airs of a woman considerably older and more experienced than himself. He thought her haughty; she was only miserable.

“You are mistaken,” said he, more quietly and with more dignity than was likely from his previous conduct. “I will not allow you to characterise as folly what might be presumptuous on my part—I had no business to express myself so soon—but which in its foundation was true and sincere. That I can answer for most solemnly. It is possible, though it may not be a usual thing, for a man to feel so strongly attracted by the charms and qualities of a woman, even at first sight, as to feel sure that she, and she alone, can make his happiness. My folly consisted—there you are right—in even dreaming that you could return my feelings in the slightest degree, when you had only seen me once; and I am most truly ashamed of myself. I cannot tell you how sorry I am, when I see how you have compelled yourself to come and speak to me when you are so ill.”

She staggered into a chair, for with all her wish for his speedy dismissal, she was obliged to be seated. His hand was upon the bell.

“No, don't!” she said. “Wait a minute.”

His eyes, bent upon her with a look of deep anxiety, touched her at that moment, and she was on the point of shedding tears; but she checked herself, and rose again.

“I will go,” said he. “It is the kindest thing I can do. Only, may I write! May I venture to write and urge what I have to say more coherently?”

“No!” said she. “Don't write. I have given you my answer. We are nothing, and can be nothing to each other. I am engaged to be married. I should not have told you if you had not been so kind. Thank you. But go now.”

The poor young man's face fell, and he became almost as white as she was for the instant. After a moment's reflection, he took her hand in his, and said—

“May God bless you, and him too, whoever he be! But if you want a friend, I may be that friend, may I not? and try to prove that my words of regard are true, in a better and higher

sense than I used them at first." And kissing her passive hand, he was gone and she was left sitting alone.

But solitude was not what she could bear. She went quickly upstairs, and took a strong dose of sal-volatile, even while she heard Miss Monro calling to her.

"My dear, who was that gentleman that has been closeted with you in the drawing-room all this time?"

And then, without listening to Ellinor's reply, she went on—

"Mrs. Jackson has been here" (it was at Mrs. Jackson's house that Mr. Dunster lodged), "wanting to know if we could tell her where Mr. Dunster was, for he never came home last night at all. And you were in the drawing-room with—who did you say he was?—that Mr. Livingstone, who might have come at a better time to bid good-bye; and he had never dined here, had he? so I don't see any reason he had to come calling, and P. P. C.-ing, and your papa *not* up. So I said to Mrs. Jackson, 'I'll send and ask Mr. Wilkins, if you like, but I don't see any use in it, for I can tell you just as well as anybody, that Mr. Dunster is not in this house, wherever he may be.' Yet nothing would satisfy her but that some one must go and waken up your papa, and ask if he could tell where Mr. Dunster was."

"And did papa?" inquired Ellinor, her dry throat huskily forming the inquiry that seemed to be expected from her.

"No! to be sure not. How should Mr. Wilkins know? As I said to Mrs. Jackson, 'Mr. Wilkins is not likely to know where Mr. Dunster spends his time when he is not in the office, for they do not move in the same rank of life, my good woman;' and Mrs. Jackson apologised, but said that yesterday they had both been dining at Mr. Hodgson's together, she believed; and somehow she had got it into her head that Mr. Dunster might have missed his way in coming along Moore Lane, and might have slipped into the canal; so she just thought she would step up and ask Mr. Wilkins if they had left Mr. Hodgson's together, or if your papa had driven home. I asked her why she had not told me all these particulars before, for I could have asked your papa myself all about when he last saw Mr. Dunster; and I went up to ask him a second time, but he did not like it at all, for he was busy dressing, and I had to shout my questions through the door, and he could not always hear me at first."

"What did he say?"

"Oh! he had walked part of the way with Mr. Dunster, and

then cut across by the short path through the fields, as far as I could understand him through the door. He seemed very much annoyed to hear that Mr. Dunster had not been at home all night; but he said I was to tell Mrs. Jackson that he would go to the office as soon as he had had his breakfast, which he ordered to be sent up directly into his own room, and he had no doubt it would all turn out right; but that she had better go home at once. And, as I told her, she might find Mr. Dunster there by the time she got there. There, there is your papa going out! He has not lost any time over his breakfast!"

Ellinor had taken up the *Hamley Examiner*, a daily paper, which lay on the table, to hide her face in the first instance; but it served a second purpose, as she glanced languidly over the columns of the advertisements.

"Oh! here are Colonel Macdonald's orchideous plants to be sold. All the stock of hothouse and stove plants at Hartwell Priory. I must send James over to Hartwell to attend the sale. It is to last for three days."

"But can he be spared for so long?"

"Oh, yes; he had better stay at the little inn there, to be on the spot. Three days," and as she spoke, she ran out to the gardener, who was sweeping up the newly-mown grass in the front of the house. She gave him hasty and unlimited directions, only seeming intent—if any one had been suspiciously watching her words and actions—to hurry him off to the distant village, where the auction was to take place.

When he was once gone she breathed more freely. Now, no one but the three cognisant of the terrible reason of the disturbance of the turf under the trees in a certain spot in the belt round the flower-garden, would be likely to go into the place. Miss Monro might wander round with a book in her hand; but she never noticed anything, and was short-sighted into the bargain. Three days of this moist, warm, growing weather, and the green grass would spring, just as if life—was what it had been twenty-four hours before.

When all this was done and said, it seemed as if Ellinor's strength and spirit sank down at once. Her voice became feeble, her aspect wan; and although she told Miss Monro that nothing was the matter, yet it was impossible for any one who loved her not to perceive that she was far from well. The kind governess placed her pupil on the sofa, covered her feet

up warmly, darkened the room, and then stole out on tiptoe, fancying that Ellinor would sleep. Her eyes were, indeed, shut; but try as much as she would to be quiet, she was up in less than five minutes after Miss Monro had left the room, and walking up and down in all the restless agony of body that arises from an overstrained mind. But soon Miss Monro reappeared, bringing with her a dose of soothing medicine of her own concocting, for she was great in domestic quackery. What the medicine was Ellinor did not care to know; she drank it without any sign of her usual merry resistance to physic of Miss Monro's ordering; and as the latter took up a book, and showed a set purpose of remaining with her patient, Ellinor was compelled to lie still, and presently fell asleep.

She awakened late in the afternoon with a start. Her father was standing over her, listening to Miss Monro's account of her indisposition. She only caught one glimpse of his strangely altered countenance, and hid her head in the cushions—hid it from memory, not from him. For in an instant she must have conjectured the interpretation he was likely to put upon her shrinking action, and she had turned towards him, and had thrown her arms round his neck, and was kissing his cold, passive face. Then she fell back. But all this time their sad eyes never met—they dreaded the look of recollection that must be in each other's gaze.

"There, my dear!" said Miss Monro. "Now you must lie still till I fetch you a little broth. You are better now, are not you?"

"You need not go for the broth, Miss Monro," said Mr. Wilkins, ringing the bell. "Fletcher can surely bring it." He dreaded the being left alone with his daughter—nor did she fear it less. She heard the strange alteration in her father's voice, hard and hoarse, as if it was an effort to speak. The physical signs of his suffering cut her to the heart; and yet she wondered how it was that they could both be alive, or, if alive, they were not rending their garments and crying aloud. Mr. Wilkins seemed to have lost the power of careless action and speech, it is true. He wished to leave the room now his anxiety about his daughter was relieved, but hardly knew how to set about it. He was obliged to think about the veriest trifle, in order that by an effort of reason he might understand how he should have spoken or acted if he had been free from blood-

guiltiness. Ellinor understood all by intuition. But henceforward the unspoken comprehension of each other's hidden motions made their mutual presence a burdensome anxiety to each. Miss Monro was a relief; they were glad of her as a third person, unconscious of the secret which constrained them. This afternoon her unconsciousness gave present pain, although on after reflection each found in her speeches a cause of rejoicing.

"And Mr. Dunster, Mr. Wilkins, has he come home yet?"

A moment's pause, in which Mr. Wilkins pumped the words out of his husky throat—

"I have not heard. I have been riding. I went on business to Mr. Estcourt's. Perhaps you will be so kind as to send and inquire at Mrs. Jackson's."

Ellinor sickened at the words. She had been all her life a truthful plain-spoken girl. She held herself high above deceit. Yet, here came the necessity for deceit—a snare spread around her. She had not revolted so much from the deed which brought unpremeditated death, as she did from these words of her father's. The night before, in her mad fever of affright, she had fancied that to conceal the body was all that would be required; she had not looked forward to the long, weary course of small lies, to be done and said, involved in that one mistaken action. Yet, while her father's words made her soul revolt, his appearance melted her heart, as she caught it, half turned away from her, neither looking straight at Miss Monro, nor at anything materially visible. His hollow sunken eye seemed to Ellinor to have a vision of the dead man before it. His cheek was livid and worn, and its healthy colouring, gained by years of hearty outdoor exercise, was all gone into the wanness of age. His hair, even to Ellinor, seemed greyer for the past night of wretchedness. He stooped, and looked dreamily earthward, where formerly he had stood erect. It needed all the pity called forth by such observation to quench Ellinor's passionate contempt for the course on which she and her father were embarked, when she heard him repeat his words to the servant who came with her broth.

"Fletcher! go to Mrs. Jackson's and inquire if Mr. Dunster is come home yet. I want to speak to him."

"To him!" lying dead where he had been laid; killed by the man who now asked for his presence. Ellinor shut her eyes, and

lay back in despair. She wished she might die, and be out of this horrible tangle of events.

Two minutes after, she was conscious of her father and Miss Monro stealing softly out of the room. They thought that she slept.

She sprang off the sofa and knelt down.

"O God," she prayed, "Thou knowest! Help me! There is none other help but Thee!"

I suppose she fainted. For, an hour or more afterwards, Miss Monro, coming in, found her lying insensible by the side of the sofa.

She was carried to bed. She was not delirious, she was only in a stupor, which they feared might end in delirium. To obviate this, her father sent far and wide for skilful physicians, who tended her, almost at the rate of a guinea the minute.

People said how hard it was upon Mr. Wilkins, that scarcely had that wretch Dunster gone off, with no one knows how much out of the trusts of the firm, before his only child fell ill. And, to tell the truth, he himself looked burnt and seared with affliction. He had a startled look, they said, as if he never could tell, after such experience, from which side the awful proofs of the uncertainty of earth would appear, the terrible phantoms of unforeseen dread. Both rich and poor, town and country, sympathised with him. The rich cared not to press their claims, or their business, at such a time; and only wondered, in their superficial talk after dinner, how such a good fellow as Wilkins could ever have been deceived by a man like Dunster. Even Sir Frank Holster and his lady forgot their old quarrel, and came to inquire after Ellinor, and sent her hothouse fruit by the bushel.

Mr. Corbet behaved as an anxious lover should do. He wrote daily to Miss Monro to beg for the most minute bulletins; he procured everything in town that any doctor even fancied might be of service. He came down as soon as there was the slightest hint of permission that Ellinor might see him. He overpowered her with tender words and caresses, till at last she shrank away from them, as from something too bewildering, and past all right comprehension.

But one night before this, when all windows and doors stood open to admit the least breath that stirred the sultry July air, a servant on velvet tiptoe had stolen up to Ellinor's open door, and

had beckoned out of the chamber of the sleeper the ever watchful nurse, Miss Monro.

"A gentleman wants you," were all the words the housemaid dared to say so close to the bedroom. And softly, softly Miss Monro stepped down the stairs, into the drawing-room; and there she saw Mr. Livingstone. But she did not know him; she had never seen him before.

"I have travelled all day. I heard she was ill—was dying. May I just have one more look at her? I will not speak; I will hardly breathe. Only let me see her once again!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I don't know who you are; and if you mean Miss Wilkins by 'her,' she is very ill, but we hope not dying. She was very ill, indeed, yesterday; very dangerously ill, I may say, but she is having a good sleep, in consequence of a soporific medicine, and we are really beginning to hope"——

But just here Miss Monro's hand was taken, and, to her infinite surprise, was kissed before she could remember how improper such behaviour was.

"God bless you, madam, for saying so. But if she sleeps, will you let me see her? it can do no harm, for I will tread as if on egg-shells; and I have come so far—if I might just look on her sweet face. Pray, madam, let me just have one sight of her. I will not ask for more."

But he did ask for more after he had had his wish. He stole upstairs after Miss Monro, who looked round reproachfully at him if even a nightingale sang, or an owl hooted in the trees outside the open windows, yet who paused to say herself, outside Mr. Wilkins's chamber door——

"Her father's room; he has not been in bed for six nights, till to-night; pray do not make a noise to waken him." And on into the deep stillness of the hushed room, where one clear ray of hidden lamplight shot athwart the floor, where a watcher, breathing softly, sat beside the bed—where Ellinor's dark head lay motionless on the white pillow, her face almost as white, her form almost as still. You might have heard a pin fall. After a while he moved to withdraw. Miss Monro, jealous of every sound, followed him, with steps all the more heavy because they were taken with so much care, down the stairs, back into the drawing-room. By the bed-candle flaring in the draught, she saw that there was the glittering mark of wet tears on his cheek; and she felt, as she said afterwards, "sorry for the young man."

And yet she urged him to go, for she knew that she might be wanted upstairs. He took her hand, and wrung it hard.

"Thank you. She looked so changed—oh! she looked as though she were dead. You will write—Herbert Livingstone, Langham Vicarage, Yorkshire; you will promise me to write. If I could do anything for her, but I can but pray. Oh, my darling; my darling! and I have no right to be with her."

"Go away, there's a good young man," said Miss Monro, all the more pressing to hurry him out by the front door, because she was afraid of his emotion overmastering him, and making him noisy in his demonstrations. "Yes, I will write; I will write, never fear!" and she bolted the door behind him and was thankful.

Two minutes afterwards there was a low tap; she undid the fastenings, and there he stood, pale in the moonlight.

"Please don't tell her I came to ask about her; she might not like it."

"No, no! not I! Poor creature, she's not likely to care to hear anything this long while. She never roused at Mr. Corbet's name."

"Mr. Corbet's!" said Livingstone, below his breath, and he turned and went away; this time for good.

But Ellinor recovered. She knew she was recovering, when day after day she felt involuntary strength and appetite return. Her body seemed stronger than her will; for that would have induced her to creep into her grave, and shut her eyes for ever on this world, so full of troubles.

She lay, for the most part, with her eyes closed, very still and quiet; but she thought with the intensity of one who seeks for lost peace, and cannot find it. She began to see that if in the mad impulses of that mad nightmare of horror, they had all strengthened each other, and dared to be frank and open, confessing a great fault, a greater disaster, a greater woe—which in the first instance was hardly a crime—their future course, though sad and sorrowful, would have been a simple and straightforward one to tread. But it was not for her to undo what was done, and to reveal the error and shame of a father. Only she, turning anew to God, in the solemn and quiet watches of the night, made a covenant, that in her conduct, her own personal individual life, she would act loyally and truthfully. And as for the future, and all the terrible chances involved in it, she would leave it in His

hands—if, indeed (and here came in the Tempter), He would watch over one whose life hereafter must seem based upon a lie. Her only plea, offered "standing afar off," was, "The lie is said and done and over—it was not for my own sake. Can filial piety be so overcome by the rights of justice and truth, as to demand of me that I should reveal my father's guilt."

Her father's severe sharp punishment began. He knew why she suffered, what made her young strength falter and tremble, what made her life seem nigh about to be quenched in death. Yet he could not take his sorrow and care in the natural manner. He was obliged to think how every word and deed would be construed. He fancied that people were watching him with suspicious eyes, when nothing was further from their thoughts. For once let the "public" of any place be possessed by an idea, it is more difficult to dislodge it than any one imagines who has not tried. If Mr. Wilkins had gone into the Hamley market-place, and proclaimed himself guilty of the manslaughter of Mr. Dunster—nay, if he had detailed all the circumstances—the people would have exclaimed, "Poor man, he is crazed by this discovery of the unworthiness of the man he trusted so; and no wonder—it was such a thing to have done—to have defrauded his partner to such an extent, and then have made off to America!"

For many small circumstances, which I do not stop to detail here, went far to prove this, as we know, unfounded supposition; and Mr. Wilkins, who was known, from his handsome boyhood, through his comely manhood, up to the present time, by all the people in Hamley, was an object of sympathy and respect to every one who saw him, as he passed by, old, and lorn, and haggard before his time, all through the evil conduct of one, London-bred, who was as a hard, unlovely stranger to the popular mind of this little country town.

Mr. Wilkins's own servants liked him. The workings of his temptations were such as they could understand. If he had been hot-tempered he had also been generous, or I should rather say careless and lavish with his money. And now that he was cheated and impoverished by his partner's delinquency, they thought it no wonder that he drank long and deep in the solitary evenings which he passed at home. It was not that he was without invitations. Every one came forward to testify their respect for him by asking him to their houses. He had probably never been so universally popular since his father's death. But,

as he said, he did not care to go into society while his daughter was so ill—he had no spirits for company.

But if any one had cared to observe his conduct at home, and to draw conclusions from it, they could have noticed that, anxious as he was about Ellinor, he rather avoided than sought her presence, now that her consciousness and memory were restored. Nor did she ask for, or wish for him. The presence of each was a burden to the other. Oh, sad and woeful night of May—overshadowing the coming summer months with gloom and bitter remorse!



CHAPTER VIII.

STILL youth prevailed over all. Ellinor got well, as I have said, even when she would fain have died. And the afternoon came when she left her room. Miss Monro would gladly have made a festival of her recovery, and have had her conveyed into the unused drawing-room. But Ellinor begged that she might be taken into the library—into the schoolroom—anywhere (thought she) not looking on the side of the house on the flower-garden, which she had felt in all her illness as a ghastly pressure lying within sight of those very windows, through which the morning sun streamed right upon her bed—like the accusing angel, bringing all hidden things to light.

And when Ellinor was better still, when the bath-chair had been sent up for her use, by some kindly old maid, out of Hamley, she still petitioned that it might be kept on the lawn or town side of the house, away from the flower-garden.

One day she almost screamed, when, as she was going to the front door, she saw Dixon standing ready to draw her, instead of Fletcher, the servant who usually went. But she checked all demonstration of feeling; although it was the first time she had seen him since he and she and one more had worked their hearts out in hard bodily labour.

He looked so stern and ill! Cross, too, which she had never seen him before.

As soon as they were out of immediate sight of the windows, she asked him to stop, forcing herself to speak to him.

“Dixon, you look very poorly,” she said, trembling as she spoke.

"Ay!" said he. "We didn't think much of it at the time, did we, Miss Nelly? But it'll be the death on us, I'm thinking. It has aged me above a bit. All my fifty years afore were but as a forenoon of child's play to that night. Measter, too—I could a-bear a good deal, but measter cuts through the stable-yard, and past me, wi'out a word, as if I was poison, or a stinking founmart. It's that as is worst, Miss Nelly, it is."

And the poor man brushed some tears from his eyes with the back of his withered, furrowed hand. Ellinor caught the infection, and cried outright, sobbed like a child, even while she held out her little white thin hand to his grasp. For as soon as he saw her emotion, he was penitent for what he had said.

"Don't now—don't," was all he could think of to say.

"Dixon!" said she at length, "you must not mind it. You must try not to mind it. I see he does not like to be reminded of that, even by seeing me. He tries never to be alone with me. My poor old Dixon, it has spoilt my life for me; for I don't think he loves me any more."

She sobbed as if her heart would break; and now it was Dixon's turn to be comforter.

"Ah, dear, my blessing, he loves you above everything. It's only he can't a-bear the sight of us, as is but natural. And if he doesn't fancy being alone with you, there's always one as does, and that's a comfort at the worst of times. And don't ye fret about what I said a minute ago. I were put out because measter all but pushed me out of his way this morning, without never a word. But I were an old fool for telling ye. And I've really forgotten why I told Fletcher I'd drag ye a bit about to-day. Th' gardener is beginning for to wonder as you don't want to see th' annuals and bedding-out things as you were so particular about in May. And I thought I'd just have a word wi' ye, and then if you'd let me, we'd go together just once round the flower-garden, just to say you've been, you know, and to give them chaps a bit of praise. You'll only have to look on th' beds, my pretty, and it must be done some time. So come along!"

He began to put resolutely in the direction of the flower-garden. Ellinor bit her lips to keep in the cry of repugnance that rose to them. As Dixon stopped to unlock the door, he said—

"It's not hardness, nothing like it; I've waited till I heerd you were better; but it's in for a penny in for a pound wi' us all;

and folk may talk ; and bless your little brave heart, you'll stand a deal for your father's sake, and so will I, though I do feel it above a bit, when he puts out his hand as if to keep me off, and I only going to speak to him about Clipper's knees ; though I'll own I had wondered many a day when I was to have the good-morrow master never missed sin' he were a boy till——Well ! and now you've seen the beds, and can say they looked mighty pretty, and is done all as you wished ; and we're got out again, and breathing fresher air than yon sun-baked hole, with its smelling flowers, not half so wholesome to snuff at as good stable-dung."

So the good man chatted on ; not without the purpose of giving Ellinor time to recover herself ; and partly also to drown his own cares, which lay heavier on his heart than he could say. But he thought himself rewarded by Ellinor's thanks, and warm pressure of his hard hand as she got out at the front door, and bade him good-bye.

The break to her days of weary monotony was the letters she constantly received from Mr. Corbet. And yet here again lurked the sting. He was all astonishment and indignation at Mr. Dunster's disappearance, or rather flight, to America. And now that she was growing stronger he did not scruple to express curiosity respecting the details, never doubting but that she was perfectly acquainted with much that he wanted to know ; although he had too much delicacy to question her on the point which was most important of all in his eyes, namely, how far it had affected Mr. Wilkins's worldly prospects ; for the report prevalent in Hamley had reached London, that Mr. Dunster had made away with, or carried off, trust property to a considerable extent, for all which Mr. Wilkins would of course be liable.

It was hard work for Ralph Corbet to keep from seeking direct information on this head from Mr. Ness, or, indeed, from Mr. Wilkins himself. But he restrained himself, knowing that in August he should be able to make all these inquiries personally. Before the end of the long vacation he had hoped to marry Ellinor : that was the time which had been planned by them when they had met in the early spring before her illness and all this misfortune happened. But now, as he wrote to his father, nothing could be definitely arranged until he had paid his visit to Hamley, and seen the state of affairs.

Accordingly one Saturday in August, he came to Ford Bank,

this time as a visitor to Ellinor's home, instead of to his old quarters at Mr. Ness's.

The house was still as if asleep in the full heat of the afternoon sun, as Mr. Corbet drove up. The window-blinds were down; the front door wide open, great stands of heliotrope and roses and geraniums stood just within the shadow of the hall; but through all the silence his approach seemed to excite no commotion. He thought it strange that he had not been watched for, that Ellinor did not come running out to meet him, that she allowed Fletcher to come and attend to his luggage, and usher him into the library just like any common visitor, any morning-caller. He stiffened himself up into a moment's indignant coldness of manner. But it vanished in an instant when, on the door being opened, he saw Ellinor standing holding by the table, looking for his appearance with almost panting anxiety. He thought of nothing then but her evident weakness, her changed looks, for which no account of her illness had prepared him. For she was deadly white, lips and all; and her dark eyes seemed unnaturally enlarged, while the caves in which they were set were strangely deep and hollow. Her hair, too, had been cut off pretty closely; she did not usually wear a cap, but with some faint idea of making herself look better in his eyes, she had put on one this day, and the effect was that she seemed to be forty years of age; but one instant after he had come in, her pale face was flooded with crimson, and her eyes were full of tears. She had hard work to keep herself from going into hysterics, but she instinctively knew how much he would hate a scene, and she checked herself in time.

"Oh," she murmured, "I am so glad to see you; it is such a comfort, such an infinite pleasure." And so she went on, cooing out words over him, and stroking his hair with her thin fingers; while he rather tried to avert his eyes, he was so much afraid of betraying how much he thought her altered.

But when she came down, dressed for dinner, this sense of her change was diminished to him. Her short brown hair had already a little wave, and was ornamented by some black lace; she wore a large black lace shawl—it had been her mother's of old—over some delicate-coloured muslin dress; her face was slightly flushed, and had the tints of a wild rose; her lips kept pale and trembling with involuntary motion, it is true; and as the lovers stood together, hand in hand, by the window, he was

aware of a little convulsive twitching at every noise, even while she seemed gazing in tranquil pleasure on the long smooth slope of the newly-mown lawn, stretching down to the little brook that prattled merrily over the stones on its merry course to Hamley town.

He felt a stronger twitch than ever before; even while his ear, less delicate than hers, could distinguish no peculiar sound. About two minutes after Mr. Wilkins entered the room. He came up to Mr. Corbet with a warm welcome: some of it real, some of it assumed. He talked volubly to him, taking little or no notice of Ellinor, who dropped into the background, and sat down on the sofa by Miss Monro; for on this day they were all to dine together. Ralph Corbet thought that Mr. Wilkins was aged; but no wonder, after all his anxiety of various kinds: Mr. Dunster's flight and reported defalcations, Ellinor's illness, of the seriousness of which her lover was now convinced by her appearance.

He would fain have spoken more to her during the dinner that ensued, but Mr. Wilkins absorbed all his attention, talking and questioning on subjects that left the ladies out of the conversation almost perpetually. Mr. Corbet recognised his host's fine tact, even while his persistence in talking annoyed him. He was quite sure that Mr. Wilkins was anxious to spare his daughter any exertion beyond that—to which, indeed, she seemed scarcely equal—of sitting at the head of the table. And the more her father talked—so fine an observer was Mr. Corbet—the more silent and depressed Ellinor appeared. But by-and-by he accounted for this inverse ratio of gaiety, as he perceived how quickly Mr. Wilkins had his glass replenished. And here, again, Mr. Corbet drew his conclusions, from the silent way in which, without a word or a sign from his master, Fletcher gave him more wine continually—wine that was drained off at once.

"Six glasses of sherry before dessert," thought Mr. Corbet to himself. "Bad habit—no wonder Ellinor looks grave." And when the gentlemen were left alone, Mr. Wilkins helped himself even still more freely; yet without the slightest effect on the clearness and brilliancy of his conversation. He had always talked well and racily, that Ralph knew, and in this power he now recognised a temptation to which he feared that his future father-in-law had succumbed. And yet, while he perceived that this gift led into temptation, he coveted it for himself; for he was

perfectly aware that this fluency, this happy choice of epithets, was the one thing he should fail in when he began to enter into the more active career of his profession. But after some time spent in listening, and admiring, with this little feeling of envy lurking in the background, Mr. Corbet became aware of Mr. Wilkins's increasing confusion of ideas, and rather unnatural merriment; and, with a sudden revulsion from admiration to disgust, he rose up to go into the library, where Ellinor and Miss Monro were sitting. Mr. Wilkins accompanied him, laughing and talking somewhat loudly. Was Ellinor aware of her father's state? Of that Mr. Corbet could not be sure. She looked up with grave sad eyes as they came into the room, but with no apparent sensation of surprise, annoyance, or shame. When her glance met her father's Mr. Corbet noticed that it seemed to sober the latter immediately. He sat down near the open window, and did not speak, but sighed heavily from time to time. Miss Monro took up a book, in order to leave the young people to themselves; and after a little low murmured conversation, Ellinor went upstairs to put on her things for a stroll through the meadows by the river-side.

They were sometimes sauntering along in the lovely summer twilight, now resting on some grassy hedgerow bank, or standing still, looking at the great barges, with their crimson sails, lazily floating down the river, making ripples on the glassy opal surface of the water. They did not talk very much; Ellinor seemed disinclined for the exertion; and her lover was thinking over Mr. Wilkins's behaviour, with some surprise and distaste of the habit so evidently growing upon him.

They came home, looking serious and tired: yet they could not account for their fatigue by the length of their walk, and Miss Monro, forgetting Autolycus's song, kept fidgeting about Ellinor, and wondering how it was she looked so pale, if she had only been as far as the Ash Meadow. To escape from this wonder, Ellinor went early to bed. Mr. Wilkins was gone, no one knew where, and Ralph and Miss Monro were left to a half-hour's *tête-à-tête*. He thought he could easily account for Ellinor's languor, if, indeed, she had perceived as much as he had done of her father's state, when they had come into the library after dinner. But there were many details which he was anxious to hear from a comparatively indifferent person, and as soon as he could, he passed on from the conversation

about Ellinor's health, to inquiries as to the whole affair of Mr. Dunster's disappearance.

Next to her anxiety about Ellinor, Miss Monro liked to dilate on the mystery connected with Mr. Dunster's flight; for that was the word she employed without hesitation, as she gave him the account of the event universally received and believed in by the people of Hamley. How Mr. Dunster had never been liked by any one; how everybody remembered that he could never look them straight in the face; how he always seemed to be hiding something that he did not want to have known; how he had drawn a large sum (exact quantity unknown) out of the county bank only the day before he left Hamley, doubtless in preparation for his escape; how some one had told Mr. Wilkins he had seen a man just like Dunster lurking about the docks at Liverpool, about two days after he had left his lodgings, but that this some one, being in a hurry, had not cared to stop and speak to the man; how that the affairs in the office were discovered to be in such a sad state that it was no wonder that Mr. Dunster had absconded—he that had been so trusted by poor dear Mr. Wilkins. Money gone no one knew how or where.

"But has he no friends who can explain his proceedings, and account for the missing money, in some way?" asked Mr. Corbet.

"No, none. Mr. Wilkins has written everywhere, right and left, I believe. I know he had a letter from Mr. Dunster's nearest relation—a tradesman in the City—a cousin, I think, and he could give no information in any way. He knew that about ten years ago Mr. Dunster had had a great fancy for going to America, and had read a great many travels—all just what a man would do before going off to a country."

"Ten years is a long time beforehand," said Mr. Corbet, half smiling; "shows malice prepense with a vengeance." But then, turning grave, he said, "Did he leave Hamley in debt?"

"No; I never heard of that," said Miss Monro, rather unwillingly, for she considered it as a piece of loyalty to the Wilkinsons, whom Mr. Dunster had injured (as she thought), to blacken his character as much as was consistent with any degree of truth.

"It is a strange story," said Mr. Corbet, musing.

"Not at all," she replied quickly; "I am sure, if you had

seen the man, with one or two side-locks of hair combed over his baldness, as if he were ashamed of it, and his eyes that never looked at you, and his way of eating with his knife when he thought he was not observed—oh, and numbers of things!—you would not think it strange.”

Mr. Corbet smiled.

“I only meant that he seems to have had no extravagant or vicious habits which would account for his embezzlement of the money that is missing—but, to be sure, money in itself is a temptation—only he, being a partner, was in a fair way of making it without risk to himself. Has Mr. Wilkins taken any steps to have him arrested in America? He might easily do that.”

“Oh, my dear Mr. Ralph, you don't know our good Mr. Wilkins! He would rather bear the loss, I am sure, and all this trouble and care which it has brought upon him, than be revenged upon Mr. Dunster.”

“Revenged! What nonsense! it is simple justice—justice to himself and to others—to see that villany is so sufficiently punished as to deter others from entering upon such courses. But I have little doubt Mr. Wilkins has taken the right steps; he is not the man to sit down quietly under such a loss.”

“No, indeed! He had him advertised in the *Times* and in the county papers, and offered a reward of twenty pounds for information concerning him.”

“Twenty pounds was too little.”

“So I said. I told Ellinor that I would give twenty pounds myself to have him apprehended, and she, poor darling! fell a-trembling, and said, ‘I would give all I have—I would give my life.’ And then she was in such distress, and sobbed so, I promised her I would never name it to her again.”

“Poor child—poor child! she wants change of scene. Her nerves have been sadly shaken by her illness.”

The next day was Sunday; Ellinor was to go to church for the first time since her illness. Her father had decided it for her, or else she would fain have stayed away—she would hardly acknowledge why, even to herself, but it seemed to her as if the very words and presence of God must there search her and find her out.

She went early, leaning on the arm of her lover, and trying to forget the past in the present. They walked slowly along

between the rows of waving golden corn ripe for the harvest. Mr. Corbet gathered blue and scarlet flowers, and made up a little rustic nosegay for her. She took and stuck it in her girdle, smiling faintly as she did so.

Hamley Church had, in former days, been collegiate, and was, in consequence, much larger and grander than the majority of country-town churches. The Ford Bank pew was a square one, downstairs; the Ford Bank servants sat in a front pew in the gallery, right before their master. Ellinor was "hardening her heart" not to listen, not to hearken to what might disturb the wound which was just being skinned over, when she caught Dixon's face up above. He looked worn, sad, soured, and anxious to a miserable degree; but he was straining eyes and ears, heart and soul, to hear the solemn words read from the pulpit, as if in them alone he could find help in his strait. Ellinor felt rebuked and humbled.

She was in a tumultuous state of mind when they left church; she wished to do her duty, yet could not ascertain what it was. Who was to help her with wisdom and advice? Assuredly he to whom her future life was to be trusted. But the case must be stated in an impersonal form. No one, not even her husband, must ever know anything against her father from her. Ellinor was so artless herself, that she had little idea how quickly and easily some people can penetrate motives, and combine disjointed sentences. She began to speak to Ralph on their slow, sauntering walk homewards through the quiet meadows.

"Suppose, Ralph, that a girl was engaged to be married"—

"I can very easily suppose that, with you by me," said he, filling up her pause.

"Oh! but I don't mean myself at all," replied she, reddening. "I am only thinking of what might happen; and suppose that this girl knew of some one belonging to her—we will call it a brother—who had done something wrong, that would bring disgrace upon the whole family if it was known—though, indeed, it might not have been so very wrong as it seemed, and as it would look to the world—ought she to break off her engagement for fear of involving her lover in the disgrace?"

"Certainly not, without telling him her reason for doing so."

"Ah! but suppose she could not. She might not be at liberty to do so."

"I can't answer supposititious cases. I must have the facts—

if facts there are—more plainly before me before I can give an opinion. Who are you thinking of, Ellinor?" asked he rather abruptly.

"Oh, of no one," she answered in affright. "Why should I be thinking of any one? I often try to plan out what I should do, or what I ought to do, if such and such a thing happened, just as you recollect I used to wonder if I should have presence of mind in case of fire."

"Then, after all, you yourself are the girl who is engaged, and who has the imaginary brother who gets into disgrace?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said she, a little annoyed at having betrayed any personal interest in the affair.

He was silent, meditating.

"There is nothing wrong in it," said she timidly, "is there?"

"I think you had better tell me fully out what is in your mind," he replied kindly. "Something has happened which has suggested these questions. Are you putting yourself in the place of any one about whom you have been hearing lately? I know you used to do so formerly, when you were a little girl."

"No; it was a very foolish question of mine, and I ought not to have said anything about it. See! here is Mr. Ness overtaking us."

The clergyman joined them on the broad walk that ran by the river-side, and the talk became general. It was a relief to Ellinor, who had not attained her end, but who had gone far towards betraying something of her own individual interest in the question she had asked. Ralph had been more struck even by her manner than her words. He was sure that something lurked behind, and had an idea of his own that it was connected with Dunster's disappearance. But he was glad that Mr. Ness's joining them gave him leisure to consider a little.

The end of his reflections was, that the next day, Monday, he went into the town, and artfully learnt all he could hear about Mr. Dunster's character and mode of going on; and with still more skill he extracted the popular opinion as to the embarrassed nature of Mr. Wilkins's affairs—embarrassment which was generally attributed to Dunster's disappearance with a good large sum belonging to the firm in his possession. But Mr. Corbet thought otherwise; he had accustomed himself to seek out the baser motives for men's conduct, and to call the result of these researches wisdom. He imagined that Dunster had been well paid

by Mr. Wilkins for his disappearance, which was an easy way of accounting for the derangement of accounts and loss of money that arose, in fact, from Mr. Wilkins's extravagance of habits and growing intemperance.

On the Monday afternoon he said to Ellinor, "Mr. Ness interrupted us yesterday in a very interesting conversation. Do you remember, love?"

Ellinor reddened, and kept her head still more intently bent over a sketch she was making.

"Yes; I recollect."

"I have been thinking about it. I still think she ought to tell her lover that such disgrace hung over him—I mean, over the family with whom he was going to connect himself. Of course, the only effect would be to make him stand by her still more for her frankness."

"Oh! but, Ralph, it might perhaps be something she ought not to tell, whatever came of her silence."

"Of course there might be all sorts of cases. Unless I knew more, I could not pretend to judge."

This was said rather more coolly. It had the desired effect. Ellinor laid down her brush, and covered her face with her hand. After a pause, she turned towards him and said—

"I will tell you this; and more you must not ask me. I know you are as safe as can be. I am the girl, you are the lover, and possible shame hangs over my father, if something—oh, so dreadful" (here she blanched), "but not so very much his fault, is ever found out."

Though this was nothing more than he expected, though Ralph thought that he was aware what the dreadful something might be, yet, when it was acknowledged in words his heart contracted, and for a moment he forgot the intent, wistful, beautiful face, creeping close to his to read his expression aright. But after that his presence of mind came in aid. He took her in his arms and kissed her; murmuring fond words of sympathy, and promises of faith, nay, even of greater love than before, since greater need she might have of that love. But somehow he was glad when the dressing-bell rang, and in the solitude of his own room he could reflect on what he had heard; for the intelligence had been a great shock to him, although he had fancied that his morning's inquiries had prepared him for it.

CHAPTER IX.

RALPH CORBET found it a very difficult thing to keep down his curiosity during the next few days. It was a miserable thing to have Ellinor's unspoken secret severing them like a phantom. But he had given her his word that he would make no further inquiries from her. Indeed, he thought he could well enough make out the outline of past events; still, there was too much left to conjecture for his mind not to be always busy on the subject. He felt inclined to probe Mr. Wilkins in their after-dinner conversation, in which his host was frank and lax enough on many subjects. But once touch on the name of Dunster and Mr. Wilkins sank into a kind of suspicious depression of spirits; talking little, and with evident caution; and from time to time shooting furtive glances at his interlocutor's face. Ellinor was resolutely impervious to any attempts of his to bring his conversation with her back to the subject which more and more engrossed Ralph Corbet's mind. She had done her duty, as she understood it; and had received assurances which she was only too glad to believe fondly with all the tender faith of her heart. Whatever came to pass, Ralph's love would still be hers; nor was he unwarned of what might come to pass in some dread future day. So she shut her eyes to what might be in store for her (and, after all, the chances were immeasurably in her favour); and she bent herself with her whole strength into enjoying the present. Day by day Mr. Corbet's spirits flagged. He was, however, so generally uniform in the tenor of his talk--never very merry, and always avoiding any subject that might call out deep feeling either on his own or any one else's part, that few people were aware of his changes of mood. Ellinor felt them, though she would not acknowledge them: it was bringing her too much face to face with the great terror of her life.

One morning he announced the fact of his brother's approaching marriage; the wedding was hastened on account of some impending event in the duke's family; and the home letter he had received that day was to bid his presence at Stokely Castle, and also to desire him to be at home by a certain time not very distant, in order to look over the requisite legal papers, and to

give his assent to some of them. He gave many reasons why this unlooked-for departure of his was absolutely necessary ; but no one doubted it. He need not have alleged such reiterated excuses. The truth was, he was restrained and uncomfortable at Ford Bank ever since Ellinor's confidence. He could not rightly calculate on the most desirable course for his own interests, while his love for her was constantly being renewed by her sweet presence. Away from her, he could judge more wisely. Nor did he allege any false reasons for his departure ; but the sense of relief to himself was so great at his recall home, that he was afraid of having it perceived by others ; and so took the very way which, if others had been as penetrating as himself, would have betrayed him.

Mr. Wilkins, too, had begun to feel the restraint of Ralph's grave watchful presence. Ellinor was not strong enough to be married ; nor was the promised money forthcoming if she had been. And to have a fellow dawdling about the house all day, sauntering into the flower-garden, peering about everywhere, and having a kind of right to put all manner of unexpected questions, was anything but agreeable. It was only Ellinor that clung to his presence—clung as though some shadow of what might happen before they met again had fallen on her spirit. As soon as he had left the house she flew up to a spare bedroom window, to watch for the last glimpse of the fly which was taking him into the town. And then she kissed the part of the pane on which his figure, waving an arm cut of the carriage window, had last appeared ; and went down slowly to gather together all the things he had last touched—the pen he had mended, the flower he had played with, and to lock them up in the little quaint cabinet that had held her treasures since she was a tiny child.

Miss Monro was, perhaps, very wise in proposing the translation of a difficult part of Dante for a distraction to Ellinor. The girl went meekly, if reluctantly, to the task set her by her good governess, and by-and-by her mind became braced by the exertion.

Ralph's people were not very slow in discovering that something had not gone on quite smoothly with him at Ford Bank. They knew his ways and looks with family intuition, and could easily be certain thus far. But not even his mother's skilfulest wiles, nor his favourite sister's coaxing, could obtain a word or

a hint ; and when his father, the squire, who had heard the opinions of the female part of the family on this head, began, in his honest blustering way, in their *tête-à-têtes* after dinner, to hope that Ralph was thinking better than to run his head into that confounded Hamley attorney's noose, Ralph gravely required Mr. Corbet to explain his meaning, which he professed not to understand so worded. And when the squire had, with much perplexity, put it into the plain terms of hoping that his son was thinking of breaking off his engagement to Miss Wilkins, Ralph coolly asked him if he was aware that, in that case, he should lose all title to being a man of honour, and might have an action brought against him for breach of promise ?

Yet not the less for all this was the idea in his mind as a future possibility.

Before very long the Corbet family moved *en masse* to Stokely Castle for the wedding. Of course, Ralph associated on equal terms with the magnates of the county, who were the employers of Ellinor's father, and spoke of him always as "Wilkins," just as they spoke of the butler as "Simmons." Here, too, among a class of men high above local gossip, and thus unaware of his engagement, he learnt the popular opinion respecting his future father-in-law ; an opinion not entirely respectful, though intermingled with a good deal of personal liking. "Poor Wilkins," as they called him, "was sadly extravagant for a man in his position ; had no right to spend money, and act as if he were a man of independent fortune." His habits of life were criticised ; and pity, not free from blame, was bestowed upon him for the losses he had sustained from his late clerk's disappearance and defalcation. But what could be expected if a man did not choose to attend to his own business ?

The wedding went by, as grand weddings do, without let or hindrance, according to the approved pattern. A Cabinet minister honoured it with his presence, and, being a distant relation of the Brabants, remained for a few days after the grand occasion. During this time he became rather intimate with Ralph Corbet ; many of their tastes were in common. Ralph took a great interest in the manner of working out political questions ; in the balance and state of parties ; and had the right appreciation of the exact qualities on which the minister piqued himself. In return, the latter was always on the look-out for promising young men, who, either by their capability of speech-

making or article-writing, might advance the views of his party. Recognising the powers he most valued in Ralph, he spared no pains to attach him to his own political set. When they separated, it was with the full understanding that they were to see a good deal of each other in London.

The holiday Ralph allowed himself was passing rapidly away ; but, before he returned to his chambers and his hard work, he had promised to spend a few more days with Ellinor ; and it suited him to go straight from the duke's to Ford Bank. He left the Castle soon after breakfast—the luxurious, elegant breakfast, served by domestics who performed their work with the accuracy and perfection of machines. He arrived at Ford Bank before the man-servant had quite finished the dirtier part of his morning's work, and he came to the glass-door in his striped cotton jacket, a little soiled, and rolling up his working apron. Ellinor was not yet strong enough to get up and go out and gather flowers for the rooms, so those left from yesterday were rather faded ; in short, the contrast from entire completeness and exquisite freshness of arrangement struck forcibly upon Ralph's perceptions, which were critical rather than appreciative ; and, as his affections were always subdued to his intellect, Ellinor's lovely face and graceful figure flying to meet him did not gain his full approval, because her hair was dressed in an old-fashioned way, her waist was either too long or too short, her sleeves too full or too tight for the standard of fashion to which his eye had been accustomed while scanning the bridesmaids and various highborn ladies at Stokely Castle.

But, as he had always piqued himself upon being able to put on one side all superficial worldliness in his chase after power, it did not do for him to shrink from seeing and facing the incompleteness of moderate means. Only marriage upon moderate means was gradually becoming more distasteful to him.

Nor did his subsequent intercourse with Lord Bolton, the Cabinet minister before mentioned, tend to reconcile him to early matrimony. At Lord Bolton's house he met polished and intellectual society, and all that smoothness in ministering to the lower wants in eating and drinking which seems to provide that the right thing shall always be at the right place at the right time, so that the want of it shall never impede for an instant the feast of wit or reason ; while, if he went to the houses of his friends, men of the same college and standing as himself, who

had been seduced into early marriages, he was uncomfortably aware of numerous inconsistencies and hitches in their *ménages*. Besides, the idea of the possible disgrace that might befall the family with which he thought of allying himself haunted him with the tenacity and also with the exaggeration of a nightmare, whenever he had overworked himself in his search after available and profitable knowledge, or had a fit of indigestion after the exquisite dinners he was learning so well to appreciate.

Christmas was, of course, to be devoted to his own family; it was an unavoidable necessity, as he told Ellinor, while, in reality, he was beginning to find absence from his betrothed something of a relief. Yet the wranglings and folly of his home, even blessed by the presence of a Lady Maria, made him look forward to Easter at Ford Bank with something of the old pleasure.

Ellinor, with the fine tact which love gives, had discovered his annoyance at various little incongruities in the household at the time of his second visit in the previous autumn, and had laboured to make all as perfect as she could before his return. But she had much to struggle against. For the first time in her life there was a great want of ready money; she could scarcely obtain the servants' wages; and the bill for the spring seeds was a heavy weight on her conscience. For Miss Monroe's methodical habits had taught her pupil great exactitude as to all money matters.

Then her father's temper had become very uncertain. He avoided being alone with her whenever he possibly could; and the consciousness of this, and of the terrible mutual secret which was the cause of this estrangement, were the reasons why Ellinor never recovered her pretty youthful bloom after her illness. Of course it was to this that the outside world attributed her changed appearance. They would shake their heads and say, "Ah, poor Miss Wilkins! What a lovely creature she was before that fever!"

But youth is youth, and will assert itself in a certain elasticity of body and spirits; and at times Ellinor forgot that fearful night for several hours together. Even when her father's averted eye brought it all once more before her, she had learnt to form excuses and palliations, and to regard Mr. Dunster's death as only the consequence of an unfortunate accident. But she tried to put the miserable remembrance entirely out of her mind; to go on from day to day thinking only of the day, and how to arrange it so as to cause the least irritation to her father. She

would so gladly have spoken to him on the one subject which overshadowed all their intercourse ; she fancied that by speaking she might have been able to banish the phantom, or reduce its terror to what she believed to be the due proportion. But her father was evidently determined to show that he was never more to be spoken to on that subject ; and all she could do was to follow his lead on the rare occasions that they fell into something like the old confidential intercourse. As yet, to her, he had never given way to anger ; but before her he had often spoken in a manner which both pained and terrified her. Sometimes his eye in the midst of his passion caught on her face of affright and dismay, and then he would stop, and make such an effort to control himself as sometimes ended in tears. Ellinor did not understand that both these phases were owing to his increasing habit of drinking more than he ought to have done. She set them down as the direct effects of a sorely burdened conscience ; and strove more and more to plan for his daily life at home, how it should go on with oiled wheels, neither a jerk nor a jar. It was no wonder she looked wistful, and careworn, and old. Miss Monro was her great comfort ; the total unconsciousness on that lady's part of anything below the surface, and yet her full and delicate recognition of all the little daily cares and trials, made her sympathy most valuable to Ellinor, while there was no need to fear that it would ever give Miss Monro that power of seeing into the heart of things which it frequently confers upon imaginative people, who are deeply attached to some one in sorrow.

There was a strong bond between Ellinor and Dixon, although they scarcely ever exchanged a word save on the most commonplace subjects ; but their silence was based on different feelings from that which separated Ellinor from her father. Ellinor and Dixon could not speak freely, because their hearts were full of pity for the faulty man whom they both loved so well, and tried so hard to respect.

This was the state of the household to which Ralph Corbet came down at Easter. He might have been known in London as a brilliant diner-out by this time ; but he could not afford to throw his life away in fireworks ; he calculated his forces, and condensed their power as much as might be, only visiting where he was likely to meet men who could help in his future career. He had been invited to spend the Easter vacation at a certain

country house which would be full of such human stepping-stones ; and he declined in order to keep his word to Ellinor, and go to Ford Bank. But he could not help looking upon himself a little in the light of a martyr to duty ; and perhaps this view of his own merits made him chafe under his future father-in-law's irritability of manner, which now showed itself even to him. He found himself distinctly regretting that he had suffered himself to be engaged so early in life ; and having become conscious of the temptation and not having repelled it at once, of course it returned and returned, and gradually obtained the mastery over him. What was to be gained by keeping to his engagement with Ellinor ? He should have a delicate wife to look after, and even more than the common additional expenses of married life. He should have a father-in-law whose character at best had had only a local and provincial respectability, which it was now daily losing by habits which were both sensual and vulgarising ; a man, too, who was strangely changing from joyous geniality into moody surliness. Besides, he doubted if, in the evident change in the prosperity of the family, the fortune to be paid down on the occasion of his marriage to Ellinor could be forthcoming. And above all, and around all, there hovered the shadow of some unrevealed disgrace, which might come to light at any time and involve him in it. He thought he had pretty well ascertained the nature of this possible shame, and had little doubt it would turn out to be that Dunster's disappearance, to America or elsewhere, had been an arranged plan with Mr. Wilkins. Although Mr. Ralph Corbet was capable of suspecting him of this mean crime (so far removed from the impulsive commission of the past sin which was dragging him daily lower and lower down), it was of a kind that was peculiarly distasteful to the acute lawyer, who foresaw how such base conduct would taint all whose names were ever mentioned, even by chance, in connection with it. He used to lie miserably tossing on his sleepless bed, turning over these things in the night season. He was tormented by all these thoughts ; he would bitterly regret the past events that connected him with Ellinor, from the day when he first came to read with Mr. Ness up to the present time. But when he came down in the morning, and saw the faded Ellinor flash into momentary beauty at his entrance into the dining-room, and when she blushing drew near with the one single

flower freshly gathered, which it had been her custom to place in his buttonhole when he came down to breakfast, he felt as if his better self was stronger than temptation, and as if he must be an honest man and honourable lover, even against his wish.

As the day wore on the temptation gathered strength. Mr. Wilkins came down, and while he was on the scene Ellinor seemed always engrossed by her father, who apparently cared little enough for all her attentions. Then there was a complaining of the food, which did not suit the sickly palate of a man who had drunk hard the night before; and possibly these complaints were extended to the servants, and their incompleteness or incapacity was thus brought prominently before the eyes of Ralph, who would have preferred to eat a dry crust in silence or to have gone without breakfast altogether, if he could have had intellectual conversation of some high order, to having the greatest dainties with the knowledge of the care required in their preparation thus coarsely discussed before him. By the time such breakfasts were finished, Ellinor looked thirty, and her spirits were gone for the day. It had become difficult for Ralph to contract his mind to her small domestic interests, and she had little else to talk to him about, now that he responded but curtly to all her questions about himself, and was weary of professing a love which he was ceasing to feel, in all the passionate nothings which usually make up so much of lovers' talk. The books she had been reading were old classics whose place in literature no longer admitted of keen discussion; the poor whom she cared for were all very well in their way; and, if they could have been brought in to illustrate a theory, hearing about them might have been of some use; but, as it was, it was simply tiresome to hear day after day of Betty Palmer's rheumatism and Mrs. Kay's baby's fits. There was no talking politics with her, because she was so ignorant that she always agreed with everything he said.

He even grew to find luncheon and Miss Monroe not unpleasant varieties to his monotonous *tête-à-têtes*. Then came the walk, generally to the town to fetch Mr. Wilkins from his office; and once or twice it was pretty evident how he had been employing his hours. One day in particular his walk was so unsteady and his speech so thick, that Ralph could only wonder how it was that Ellinor did not perceive the cause; but she was too openly anxious about the headache of which her father complained to

have been at all aware of the previous self-indulgence which must have brought it on. This very afternoon, as ill-luck would have it, the Duke of Hinton and a gentleman whom Ralph had met in town at Lord Bolton's rode by, and recognised him; saw Ralph supporting a tipsy man with such quiet friendly interest as must show all passers-by that they were previous friends. Mr. Corbet chafed and fumed inwardly all the way home after this unfortunate occurrence; he was in a thoroughly evil temper before they reached Ford Bank, but he had too much self-command to let this be very apparent. He turned into the shrubby paths, leaving Ellinor to take her father into the quietness of his own room, there to lie down and shake off his headache.

Ralph walked along, ruminating in gloomy mood as to what was to be done; how he could best extricate himself from the miserable relation in which he had placed himself by giving way to impulse. Almost before he was aware, a little hand stole within his folded arms, and Ellinor's sweet sad eyes looked into his.

"I have put papa down for an hour's rest before dinner," said she. "His head seems to ache terribly."

Ralph was silent and unsympathising, trying to nerve himself up to be disagreeable, but finding it difficult in the face of such sweet trust.

"Do you remember our conversation last autumn, Ellinor?" he began at length.

Her head sank. They were near a garden-seat, and she quietly sat down, without speaking.

"About some disgrace which you then fancied hung over you?" No answer. "Does it still hang over you?"

"Yes!" she whispered, with a heavy sigh.

"And your father knows this, of course?"

"Yes!" again in the same tone; and then silence.

"I think it is doing him harm," at length Ralph went on decidedly.

"I am afraid it is," she said, in a low tone.

"I wish you would tell me what it is," he said, a little impatiently. "I might be able to help you about it."

"No! you could not," replied Ellinor. "I was sorry to my very heart to tell you what I did; I did not want help; all that is past. But I wanted to know if you thought that a person

situated as I was, was justified in marrying any one ignorant of what might happen, what I do hope and trust never will."

"But if I don't know what you are alluding to in this mysterious way, you must see—don't you see, love?—I am in the position of the ignorant man whom I think you said you could not feel it right to marry. Why don't you tell me straight out what it is?" He could not help his irritation betraying itself in his tones and manner of speaking. She bent a little forward, and looked full into his face, as though to pierce to the very heart's truth of him. Then she said, as quietly as she had ever spoken in her life—

"You wish to break off our engagement?"

He reddened and grew indignant in a moment. "What nonsense! Just because I ask a question and make a remark! I think your illness must have made you fanciful, Ellinor. Surely nothing I said deserves such an interpretation. On the contrary, have I not shown the sincerity and depth of my affection to you by clinging to you through—through everything?"

He was going to say "through the wearying opposition of my family," but he stopped short, for he knew that the very fact of his mother's opposition had only made him the more determined to have his own way in the first instance; and even now he did not intend to let out, what he had concealed up to this time, that his friends all regretted his imprudent engagement.

Ellinor sat silently gazing out upon the meadows, but seeing nothing. Then she put her hand into his. "I quite trust you, Ralph. I was wrong to doubt. I am afraid I have grown fanciful and silly."

He was rather put to it for the right words, for she had precisely divined the dim thought that had overshadowed his mind when she had looked so intently at him. But he caressed her, and reassured her with fond words, as incoherent as lovers' words generally are.

By-and-by they sauntered homewards. When they reached the house, Ellinor left him, and flew up to see how her father was. When Ralph went into his own room he was vexed with himself, both for what he had said and for what he had not said. His mental look-out was not satisfactory.

Neither he nor Mr. Wilkins was in good humour with the world in general at dinner-time, and it needs little in such cases to condense and turn the lowering tempers into one

particular direction. As long as Ellinor and Miss Monro stayed in the dining-room, a sort of moody peace had been kept up, the ladies talking incessantly to each other about the trivial nothings of their daily life, with an instinctive consciousness that if they did not chatter on, something would be said by one of the gentlemen which would be distasteful to the other.

As soon as Ralph had shut the door behind them, Mr. Wilkins went to the sideboard, and took out a bottle which had not previously made its appearance.

"Have a little cognac?" he asked, with an assumption of carelessness, as he poured out a wine-glassful. "It's a capital thing for the headache; and this nasty lowering weather has given me a racking headache all day."

"I am sorry for it," said Ralph, "for I wanted particularly to speak to you about business—about my marriage, in fact."

"Well! speak away, I'm as clear-headed as any man, if that's what you mean."

Ralph bowed, a little contemptuously.

"What I wanted to say was, that I am anxious to have all things arranged for my marriage in August. Ellinor is so much better now; in fact, so strong, that I think we may reckon upon her standing the change to a London life pretty well."

Mr. Wilkins stared at him rather blankly, but did not immediately speak.

"Of course I may have the deeds drawn up in which, as by previous arrangement, you advance a certain portion of Ellinor's fortune for the purposes therein to be assigned; as we settled last year when I hoped to have been married in August?"

A thought flitted through Mr. Wilkins's confused brain that he should find it impossible to produce the thousands required without having recourse to the money-lenders, who were already making difficulties, and charging him usurious interest for the advances they had lately made; and he unwisely tried to obtain a diminution in the sum he had originally proposed to give Ellinor. "Unwisely," because he might have read Ralph's character better than to suppose he would easily consent to any diminution without good and sufficient reason being given; or without some promise of compensating advantages in the future for the present sacrifice asked from him. But perhaps Mr.

Wilkins, dulled as he was by wine, thought he could allege a good and sufficient reason, for he said—

“You must not be hard upon me, Ralph. That promise was made before—before I exactly knew the state of my affairs!”

“Before Dunster's disappearance, in fact,” said Mr. Corbet, fixing his steady, penetrating eyes on Mr. Wilkins's countenance.

“Yes—exactly—before Dunster's”—— mumbled out Mr. Wilkins, red and confused, and not finishing his sentence.

“By the way,” said Ralph (for with careful carelessness of manner he thought he could extract something of the real nature of the impending disgrace from his companion, in the state in which he then was; and if he only knew more about this danger he could guard against it; guard others; perhaps himself)—“By the way, have you ever heard anything of Dunster since he went off to—America, isn't it thought?”

He was startled beyond his power of self-control by the instantaneous change in Mr. Wilkins which his question produced. Both started up; Mr. Wilkins white, shaking, and trying to say something, but unable to form a sensible sentence.

“Good God! sir, what is the matter?” said Ralph, alarmed at these signs of physical suffering.

Mr. Wilkins sat down, and repelled his nearer approach without speaking.

“It is nothing, only this headache which shoots through me at times. Don't look at me, sir, in that way. It is very unpleasant to find another man's eyes perpetually fixed upon you.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Ralph coldly; his short-lived sympathy, thus repulsed, giving way to his curiosity. But he waited for a minute or two without daring to renew the conversation at the point where they had stopped: whether interrupted by bodily or mental discomfort on the part of his companion he was not quite sure. While he hesitated how to begin again on the subject, Mr. Wilkins pulled the bottle of brandy to himself and filled his glass again, tossing off the spirit as if it had been water. Then he tried to look Mr. Corbet full in the face, with a stare as pertinacious as he could make it, but very different from the keen observant gaze which was trying to read him through.

“What were we talking about?” said Ralph at length, with the most natural air in the world, just as if he had really been forgetful of some half-discussed subject of interest.

"Of what you'd a d——d deal better hold your tongue about," growled out Mr. Wilkins, in a surly thick voice.

"Sir!" said Ralph, starting to his feet with real passion at being so addressed by "Wilkins the attorney."

"Yes," continued the latter, "I'll manage my own affairs, and allow of no meddling and no questioning. I said so once before, and I was not minded, and bad came of it; and now I say it again. And if you're to come here and put impertinent questions, and stare at me as you've been doing this half-hour past, why, the sooner you leave this house the better!"

Ralph half turned to take him at his word, and go at once; but then he "gave Ellinor another chance," as he worded it in his thoughts; but it was in no spirit of conciliation that he said—

"You've taken too much of that stuff, sir. You don't know what you're saying. If you did, I should leave your house at once, never to return."

"You think so, do you?" said Mr. Wilkins, trying to stand up, and look dignified and sober. "I say, sir, that if you ever venture again to talk and look as you have done to-night, why, sir, I will ring the bell and have you shown the door by my servants. So now you're warned, my fine fellow!" He sat down, laughing a foolish tipsy laugh of triumph. In another minute his arm was held firmly but gently by Ralph.

"Listen, Mr. Wilkins," he said, in a low hoarse voice. "You shall never have to say to me twice what you have said to-night. Henceforward we are as strangers to each other. As to Ellinor"—his tones softened a little, and he sighed in spite of himself—"I do not think we should have been happy. I believe our engagement was formed when we were too young to know our own minds, but I would have done my duty and kept to my word; but you, sir, have yourself severed the connection between us by your insolence to-night. I, to be turned out of your house by your servants!—I, a Corbet of Westley, who would not submit to such threats from a peer of the realm, let him be ever so drunk!" He was out of the room, almost out of the house, before he had spoken the last words.

Mr. Wilkins sat still, first fiercely angry, then astonished, and lastly dismayed into sobriety. "Corbet, Corbet! Ralph!" he called in vain; then he got up and went to the door, opened it, looked into the fully-lighted hall; all was so quiet there that he

could hear the quiet voices of the women in the drawing-room talking together. He thought for a moment, went to the hat-stand, and missed Ralph's low-crowned straw hat.

Then he sat down once more in the dining-room, and endeavoured to make out exactly what had passed; but he could not believe that Mr. Corbet had come to any enduring or final resolution to break off his engagement, and he had almost reasoned himself back into his former state of indignation at impertinence and injury, when Ellinor came in, pale, hurried, and anxious.

"Papa! what does this mean?" said she, putting an open note into his hand. He took up his glasses, but his hand shook so that he could hardly read. The note was from the Parsonage, to Ellinor; only three lines sent by Mr. Ness's servant, who had come to fetch Mr. Corbet's things. He had written three lines with some consideration for Ellinor, even when he was in his first flush of anger against her father, and it must be confessed of relief at his own freedom, thus brought about by the act of another, and not of his own working out, which partly saved his conscience. The note ran thus:

"DEAR ELLINOR,—Words have passed between your father and me which have obliged me to leave his house, I fear, never to return to it. I will write more fully to-morrow. But do not grieve too much, for I am not, and never have been, good enough for you. God bless you, my dearest Nelly, though I call you so for the last time.—R. C."

"Papa, what is it?" Ellinor cried, clasping her hands together, as her father sat silent, vacantly gazing into the fire, after finishing the note.

"I don't know!" said he, looking up at her piteously; "it's the world, I think. Everything goes wrong with me and mine: it went wrong before THAT night—so it can't be that, can it, Ellinor?"

"Oh, papa!" said she, kneeling down by him, her face hidden on his breast.

He put one arm languidly round her. "I used to read of Orestes and the Furies at Eton when I was a boy, and I thought it was all a heathen fiction. Poor little motherless girl!" said he, laying his other hand on her head, with the caressing gesture

he had been accustomed to use when she had been a little child. "Did you love him so very dearly, Nelly?" he whispered, his cheek against her; "for somehow of late he has not seemed to me good enough for thee. He has got an inkling that something has gone wrong, and he was very inquisitive—I may say he questioned me in a relentless kind of way."

"Oh, papa, it was my doing, I'm afraid. I said something long ago about possible disgrace."

He pushed her away; he stood up, and looked at her with the eyes dilated, half in fear, half in fierceness, of an animal at bay; he did not heed that his abrupt movement had almost thrown her prostrate on the ground.

"You, Ellinor! You—you"—

"Oh, darling father, listen!" said she, creeping to his knees, and clasping them with her hands. "I said it, as if it were a possible case, of some one else—last August—but he immediately applied it, and asked me if it was over me the disgrace, or shame—I forget the words we used—hung; and what could I say?"

"Anything—anything to put him off the scent. God help me, I am a lost man, betrayed by my child!"

Ellinor let go his knees, and covered her face. Every one stabbed at that poor heart. In a minute or so her father spoke again.

"I don't mean what I say. I often don't mean it now. Ellinor, you must forgive me, my child!" He stooped, and lifted her up, and sat down, taking her on his knee, and smoothing her hair off her hot forehead. "Remember, child, how very miserable I am, and have forgiveness for me. He had none, and yet he must have seen I had been drinking."

"Drinking, papa!" said Ellinor, raising her head, and looking at him with sorrowful surprise.

"Yes. I drink now to try and forget," said he, blushing and confused.

"Oh, how miserable we are!" cried Ellinor, bursting into tears—"how very miserable! It seems almost as if God had forgotten to comfort us!"

"Hush! hush!" said he. "Your mother said once she did so pray that you might grow up religious; you must be religious, child, because she prayed for it so often. Poor Lettice, how glad I am that you are dead!" Here he began to cry like a child.

Ellinor comforted him with kisses rather than words. He pushed her away, after a while, and said sharply: "How much does he know? I must make sure of that. How much did you tell him, Ellinor?"

"Nothing—nothing, indeed, papa, but what I told you just now!"

"Tell it me again—the exact words!"

"I will, as well as I can; but it was last August. I only said, 'Was it right for a woman to marry, knowing that disgrace hung over her, and keeping her lover in ignorance of it?'"

"That was all, you are sure?"

"Yes. He immediately applied the case to me—to ourselves."

"And he never wanted to know what was the nature of the threatened disgrace?"

"Yes, he did."

"And you told him?"

"No, not a word more. He referred to the subject again to-day, in the shrubbery; but I told him nothing more. You quite believe me, don't you, papa?"

He pressed her to him, but did not speak. Then he took the note up again, and read it with as much care and attention as he could collect in his agitated state of mind.

"Nelly," said he at length, "he says true; he is not good enough for thee. He shrinks from the thought of the disgrace. Thou must stand alone, and bear the sins of thy father."

He shook so much as he said this, that Ellinor had to put any suffering of her own on one side, and try to confine her thoughts to the necessity of getting her father immediately up to bed. She sat by him till he went to sleep, and she could leave him, and go to her own room, to forgetfulness and rest, if she could find those priceless blessings.



CHAPTER X.

MR. CORBET was so well known at the Parsonage by the two old servants, that he had no difficulty, on reaching it, after his departure from Ford Bank, in having the spare bedchamber made ready for him, late as it was, and in the absence of the master, who had taken a little holiday, now that Lent and

Easter were over, for the purpose of fishing. While his room was getting ready, Ralph sent for his clothes, and by the same messenger he despatched the little note to Ellinor. But there was the letter he had promised her in it still to be written; and it was almost his night's employment to say enough, yet not too much; for, as he expressed it to himself, he was half way over the stream, and it would be folly to turn back, for he had given nearly as much pain both to himself and Ellinor by this time as he should do by making the separation final. Besides, after Mr. Wilkins's speeches that evening—but he was candid enough to acknowledge that, bad and offensive as they had been, if they had stood alone they might have been condoned.

His letter ran as follows:—

“DEAREST ELLINOR, for dearest you are, and I think will ever be, my judgment has consented to a step which is giving me great pain, greater than you will readily believe. I am convinced that it is better that we should part; for circumstances have occurred since we formed our engagement which, although I am unaware of their exact nature, I can see weigh heavily upon you, and have materially affected your father's behaviour—nay, I think, after to-night, I may almost say have entirely altered his feelings towards me. What these circumstances are I am ignorant, any further than that I know from your own admission, that they may lead to some future disgrace. Now, it may be my fault, it may be in my temperament, to be anxious, above all things earthly, to obtain and possess a high reputation. I can only say that it is so, and leave you to blame me for my weakness as much as you like. But anything that might come in between me and this object would, I own, be ill tolerated by me; the very dread of such an obstacle intervening would paralyse me. I should become irritable, and, deep as my affection is, and always must be, towards you, I could not promise you a happy, peaceful life. I should be perpetually haunted by the idea of what might happen in the way of discovery and shame. I am the more convinced of this from my observation of your father's altered character—an alteration which I trace back to the time when I conjecture that the secret affairs took place to which you have alluded. In short, it is for your sake, my dear Ellinor, even more than for my own, that I feel compelled to affix a final

meaning to the words which your father addressed to me last night, when he desired me to leave his house for ever. God bless you, my Ellinor, for the last time my Ellinor. Try to forget as soon as you can the unfortunate tie which has bound you for a time to one so unsuitable—I believe I ought to say so unworthy of you—as—RALPH CORBET.”

Ellinor was making breakfast when this letter was given her. According to the wont of the servants of the respective households of the Parsonage and Ford Bank, the man asked if there was any answer. It was only custom ; for he had not been desired to do so. Ellinor went to the window to read her letter ; the man waiting all the time respectfully for her reply. She went to the writing-table, and wrote—

“It is all right—quite right. I ought to have thought of it all last August. I do not think you will forget me easily, but I entreat you never at any future time to blame yourself. I hope you will be happy and successful. I suppose I must never write to you again : but I shall always pray for you. Papa was very sorry last night for having spoken angrily to you. You must forgive him—there is great need for forgiveness in this world.—
ELLINOR.”

She kept putting down thought after thought, just to prolong the last pleasure of writing to him. She sealed the note, and gave it to the man. Then she sat down and waited for Miss Monro, who had gone to bed on the previous night without awaiting Ellinor's return from the dining-room.

“I am late, my dear,” said Miss Monro, on coming down, “but I have a bad headache, and I knew you had a pleasant companion.” Then, looking round, she perceived Ralph's absence.

“Mr. Corbet not down yet !” she exclaimed. And then Ellinor had to tell her the outline of the facts so soon likely to be made public ; that Mr. Corbet and she had determined to break off their engagement ; and that Mr. Corbet had accordingly betaken himself to the Parsonage ; and that she did not expect him to return to Ford Bank. Miss Monro's astonishment was unbounded. She kept going over and over all the little circumstances she had noticed during the last visit, only on yesterday,

in fact, which she could not reconcile with the notion that the two, apparently so much attached to each other but a few hours before, were now to be for ever separated and estranged. Ellinor sickened under the torture; which yet seemed like torture in a dream, from which there must come an awakening and a relief. She felt as if she could not bear any more; yet there was more to bear. Her father, as it turned out, was very ill, and had been so all night long; he had evidently had some kind of attack on the brain, whether apoplectic or paralytic it was for the doctors to decide. In the hurry and anxiety of this day of misery succeeding to misery, she almost forgot to wonder whether Ralph were still at the Parsonage—still in Hamley; it was not till the evening visit of the physician that she learnt that he had been seen by Dr. Moore as he was taking his place in the morning mail to London. Dr. Moore alluded to his name as to a thought that would cheer and comfort the fragile girl during her night-watch by her father's bedside. But Miss Monro stole out after the doctor to warn him off the subject for the future, crying bitterly over the forlorn position of her darling as she spoke—crying as Ellinor had never yet been able to cry; though all the time, in the pride of her sex, she was endeavouring to persuade the doctor it was entirely Ellinor's doing, and the wisest and best thing she could have done, as he was not good enough for her, only a poor barrister struggling for a livelihood. Like many other kind-hearted people, she fell into the blunder of lowering the moral character of those whom it is their greatest wish to exalt. But Dr. Moore knew Ellinor too well to believe the whole of what Miss Monro said; she would never act from interested motives, and was all the more likely to cling to a man because he was down and unsuccessful. No! there had been a lovers' quarrel; and it could not have happened at a sadder time.

Before the June roses were in full bloom, Mr. Wilkins was dead. He had left his daughter to the guardianship of Mr. Ness by some will made years ago; but Mr. Ness had caught a rheumatic fever with his Easter fishings, and been unable to be moved home from the little Welsh inn where he had been staying when he was taken ill. Since his last attack, Mr. Wilkins's mind had been much affected; he often talked strangely and wildly; but he had rare intervals of quietness and full possession of his senses. At one of these times he must have written a half-

finished pencil note, which his nurse found under his pillow after his death, and brought to Ellinor. Through her tear-blinded eyes she read the weak, faltering words—

“ I am very ill. I sometimes think I shall never get better, so I wish to ask your pardon for what I said the night before I was taken ill. I am afraid my anger made mischief between you and Ellinor, but I think you will forgive a dying man. If you will come back and let all be as it used to be, I will make any apology you may require. If I go, she will be so very friendless; and I have looked to you to care for her ever since you first”—— Then came some illegible and incoherent writing, ending with, “ From my deathbed I adjure you to stand her friend; I will beg pardon on my knees for anything”——

And there strength had failed; the paper and pencil had been laid aside to be resumed at some time when the brain was clearer, the hand stronger. Ellinor kissed the letter, reverently folded it up, and laid it among her sacred treasures, by her mother's half-finished sewing, and a little curl of her baby sister's golden hair.

Mr. Johnson, who had been one of the trustees for Mrs. Wilkins's marriage settlement, a respectable solicitor in the county town, and Mr. Ness, had been appointed executors of his will, and guardians to Ellinor. The will itself had been made several years before, when he imagined himself the possessor of a handsome fortune, the bulk of which he bequeathed to his only child. By her mother's marriage-settlement, Ford Bank was held in trust for the children of the marriage; the trustees being Sir Frank Holster and Mr. Johnson. There were legacies to his executors; a small annuity to Miss Monro, with the expression of a hope that it might be arranged for her to continue living with Ellinor as long as the latter remained unmarried; all his servants were remembered, Dixon especially, and most liberally.

What remained of the handsome fortune once possessed by the testator? The executors asked in vain; there was nothing. They could hardly make out what had become of it, in such utter confusion were all the accounts, both personal and official. Mr. Johnson was hardly restrained by his compassion for the orphan from throwing up the executorship in disgust. Mr. Ness roused himself from his scholarlike abstraction to labour at the examination of books, parchments, and papers, for Ellinor's

sake. Sir Frank Holster professed himself only a trustee for Ford Bank.

Meanwhile she went on living at Ford Bank, quite unconscious of the state of her father's affairs, but sunk into a deep, plaintive melancholy, which affected her looks and the tones of her voice in such a manner as to distress Miss Monro exceedingly. It was not that the good lady did not quite acknowledge the great cause her pupil had for grieving—deserted by her lover, her father dead—but that she could not bear the outward signs of how much these sorrows had told on Ellinor. Her love for the poor girl was infinitely distressed by seeing the daily wasting away, the constant heavy depression of spirits, and she grew impatient of the continual pain of sympathy. If Miss Monro could have done something to relieve Ellinor of her woe, she would have been less inclined to scold her for giving way to it.

The time came when Miss Monro could act; and after that, there was no more irritation on her part. When all hope of Ellinor's having anything beyond the house and grounds of Ford Bank was gone; when it was proved that of all the legacies bequeathed by Mr. Wilkins not one farthing could ever be paid; when it came to be a question how far the beautiful pictures and other objects of art in the house were not legally the property of unsatisfied creditors, the state of her father's affairs was communicated to Ellinor as delicately as Mr. Ness knew how.

She was drooping over her work—she always drooped now—and she left off sewing to listen to him, leaning her head on the arm which rested on the table. She did not speak when he had ended his statement. She was silent for whole minutes afterwards; he went on speaking out of very agitation and awkwardness.

"It was all the rascal Dunster's doing, I've no doubt," said he, trying to account for the entire loss of Mr. Wilkins's fortune.

To his surprise she lifted up her white stony face, and said, slowly and faintly, but with almost solemn calmness—

"Mr. Ness, you must never allow Mr. Dunster to be blamed for this!"

"My dear Ellinor, there can be no doubt about it. Your father himself always referred to the losses he had sustained by Dunster's disappearance."

Ellinor covered her face with her hands. "God forgive us all," she said, and relapsed into the old unbearable silence. Mr. Ness

had undertaken to discuss her future plans with her, and he was obliged to go on.

"Now, my dear child—I have known you since you were quite a little girl, you know—we must try not to give way to feeling"—he himself was choking; she was quite quiet—"but think what is to be done. You will have the rent of this house, and we have a very good offer for it—a tenant on lease of seven years at a hundred and twenty pounds a year"—

"I will never let this house," said she, standing up suddenly, and as if defying him.

"Not let Ford Bank! Why? I don't understand it—I can't have been clear—Ellinor, the rent of this house is all you will have to live on!"

"I can't help it, I can't leave this house. Oh, Mr. Ness, I can't leave this house."

"My dear child, you shall not be hurried—I know how hardly all these things are coming upon you (and I wish I had never seen Corbet, with all my heart I do!)"—this was almost to himself, but she must have heard it, for she quivered all over—"but leave this house you must. You must eat, and the rent of this house must pay for your food; you must dress, and there is nothing but the rent to clothe you. I will gladly have you to stay at the Parsonage as long as ever you like; but, in fact, the negotiations with Mr. Osbaldistone, the gentleman who offers to take the house, are nearly completed"—

"It is my house!" said Ellinor fiercely. "I know it is settled on me."

"No, my dear. It is held in trust for you by Sir Frank Holster and Mr. Johnson; you to receive all moneys and benefits accruing from it"—he spoke gently, for he almost thought her head was turned—"but you remember you are not of age, and Mr. Johnson and I have full power."

Ellinor sat down, helpless.

"Leave me," she said at length. "You are very kind, but you don't know all. I cannot stand any more talking now," she added faintly.

Mr. Ness bent over her and kissed her forehead, and withdrew without another word. He went to Miss Monro.

"Well! and how did you find her?" was her first inquiry, after the usual greetings had passed between them. "It is really quite sad to see how she gives way; I speak to her, and speak to

her, and tell her how she is neglecting all her duties, and it does no good."

"She has had to bear a still further sorrow to-day," said Mr. Ness. "On the part of Mr. Johnson and myself I have a very painful duty to perform to you as well as to her. Mr. Wilkins has died insolvent. I grieve to say there is no hope of your ever receiving any of your annuity!"

Miss Monro looked very blank. Many happy little visions faded away in those few moments; then she roused up and said, "I am but forty; I have a good fifteen years of work in me left yet, thank God. Insolvent! Do you mean he has left no money?"

"Not a farthing. The creditors may be thankful if they are fully paid."

"And Ellinor?"

"Ellinor will have the rent of this house, which is hers by right of her mother's settlement, to live on."

"How much will that be?"

"One hundred and twenty pounds."

Miss Monro's lips went into a form prepared for whistling. Mr. Ness continued—

"She is at present unwilling enough to leave this house, poor girl. It is but natural; but she has no power in the matter, even were there any other course open to her. I can only say how glad, how honoured, I shall feel by as long a visit as you and she can be prevailed upon to pay me at the Parsonage."

"Where is Mr. Corbet?" said Miss Monro.

"I do not know. After breaking off his engagement he wrote me a long letter, explanatory, as he called it; exculpatory, as I termed it. I wrote back, curtly enough, saying that I regretted the breaking-off of an intercourse which had always been very pleasant to me, but that he must be aware that, with my intimacy with the family at Ford Bank, it would be both awkward and unpleasant to all parties if he and I remained on our previous footing. Who is that going past the window? Ellinor riding?"

Miss Monro went to the window. "Yes! I am thankful to see her on horseback again. It was only this morning I advised her to have a ride!"

"Poor Dixon! he will suffer too; his legacy can no more be paid than the others; and it is not many young ladies who will be as content to have so old-fashioned a groom riding after them as Ellinor seems to be."

As soon as Mr. Ness had left, Miss Monro went to her desk and wrote a long letter to some friends she had at the cathedral town of East Chester, where she had spent some happy years of her former life. Her thoughts had gone back to this time even while Mr. Ness had been speaking; for it was there her father had lived, and it was after his death that her cares in search of a subsistence had begun. But the recollections of the peaceful years spent there were stronger than the remembrance of the weeks of sorrow and care; and, while Ellinor's marriage had seemed a probable event, she had made many a little plan of returning to her native place, and obtaining what daily teaching she could there meet with, and the friends to whom she was now writing had promised her their aid. She thought that as Ellinor had to leave Ford Bank, a home at a distance might be more agreeable to her, and she went on to plan that they should live together, if possible, on her earnings, and the small income that would be Ellinor's. Miss Monro loved her pupil so dearly, that, if her own pleasure only were to be consulted, this projected life would be more agreeable to her than if Mr. Wilkins's legacy had set her in independence, with Ellinor away from her, married, and with interests in which her former governess had but little part.

As soon as Mr. Ness had left her, Ellinor rang the bell, and startled the servant who answered it by her sudden sharp desire to have the horses at the door as soon as possible, and to tell Dixon to be ready to go out with her.

She felt that she must speak to him, and in her nervous state she wanted to be out on the free broad common, where no one could notice or remark their talk. It was long since she had ridden, and much wonder was excited by the sudden movement in kitchen and stable-yard. But Dixon went gravely about his work of preparation, saying nothing.

They rode pretty hard till they reached Monk's Heath, six or seven miles away from Hamley. Ellinor had previously determined that here she would talk over the plan Mr. Ness had proposed to her with Dixon, and he seemed to understand her without any words passing between them. When she reined in he rode up to her, and met the gaze of her sad eyes with sympathetic, wistful silence.

"Dixon," said she, "they say I must leave Ford Bank."

"I was afeared on it, from all I've heerd say i' the town since the master's death."

"Then you've heard—then you know—that papa has left hardly any money—my poor dear Dixon, you won't have your legacy, and I never thought of that before!"

"Never heed, never heed," said he eagerly; "I couldn't have touched it if it had been there, for the taking it would ha' seemed too like"—Blood-money, he was going to say, but he stopped in time. She guessed the meaning, though not the word he would have used.

"No, not that," said she; "his will was dated years before. But oh, Dixon, what must I do? They will make me leave Ford Bank, I see. I think the trustees have half let it already."

"But you'll have the rent on't, I reckon?" asked he anxiously. "I've many a time heerd 'em say as it was settled on the missus first, and then on you."

"Oh, yes, it is not that; but you know, under the beech-tree"——

"Ay!" said he heavily. "It's been oftentimes on my mind, waking, and I think there's ne'er a night as I don't dream of it."

"But how can I leave it?" Ellinor cried. "They may do a hundred things—may dig up the shrubbery. Oh! Dixon, I feel as if it was sure to be found out! Oh! Dixon, I cannot bear any more blame on papa—it will kill me—and such a dreadful thing, too!"

Dixon's face fell into the lines of habitual pain that it had always assumed of late years whenever he was thinking or remembering anything.

"They must ne'er ha' reason to speak ill of the dead, that's for certain," said he. "The Wilkinsons have been respected in Hamley all my lifetime, and all my father's before me, and—surely, missy, there's ways and means of tying tenants up from alterations both in the house and out of it, and I'd beg the trustees, or whatever they's called, to be very particular, if I was you, and not have a thing touched either in the house, or the gardens, or the meadows, or the stables. I think, wi' a word from you, they'd maybe keep me on i' the stables, and I could look after things a bit; and the Day o' Judgment will come at last, when all our secrets will be made known wi'out our having the trouble and the shame o' telling 'em. I'm getting rayther tired o' this world, Miss Ellinor."

"Don't talk so," said Ellinor tenderly. "I know how sad it is, but, oh! remember how I shall want a friend when you're

gone, to advise me as you have done to-day. You're not feeling ill, Dixon, are you?" she continued anxiously.

"No! I'm hearty enough, and likely for t' live. Father was eighty-one, and mother above the seventies, when they died. It's only my heart as is got to feel so heavy; and as for that matter, so is yours, I'll be bound. And it's a comfort to us both if we can serve him as is dead by any care of ours, for he were such a bright handsome lad, with such a cheery face, as never should ha' known shame."

They rode on without much more speaking. Ellinor was silently planning for Dixon, and he, not caring to look forward to the future, was bringing up before his fancy the time, thirty years ago, when he had first entered the elder Mr. Wilkins's service as stable-lad, and pretty Molly, the scullery-maid, was his daily delight. Pretty Molly lay buried in Hamley churchyard, and few living, except Dixon, could have gone straight to her grave.



CHAPTER XI.

In a few days Miss Monro obtained a most satisfactory reply to her letter of inquiries as to whether a daily governess could find employment in East Chester. For once the application seemed to have come just at the right time. The canons were most of them married men, with young families; those at present in residence welcomed the idea of such instruction as Miss Monro could offer for their children, and could almost answer for their successors in office. This was a great step gained. Miss Monro, the daughter of a precentor to this very cathedral, had a secret unwillingness to being engaged as a teacher by any wealthy tradesman there; but to be received into the canons' families, in almost any capacity, was like going home. Moreover, besides the empty honour of the thing, there were many small pieces of patronage in the gift of the Chapter—such as a small house opening on to the Close, which had formerly belonged to the verger, but which was now vacant, and was offered to Miss Monro at a nominal rent.

Ellinor had once more sunk into her old depressed passive state; Mr. Ness and Miss Monro, modest and undecided as they both were in general, had to fix and arrange everything for

her. Her great interest seemed to be in the old servant Dixon, and her great pleasure to lie in seeing him, and talking over old times; so her two friends talked about her, little knowing what a bitter, stinging pain her "pleasure" was. In vain Ellinor tried to plan how they could take Dixon with them to East Chester. If he had been a woman it would have been a feasible step; but they were only to keep one servant, and Dixon, capable and versatile as he was, would not do for that servant. All this was what passed through Ellinor's mind: it is still a question whether Dixon would have felt his love of his native place, with all its associations and remembrances, or his love for Ellinor, the stronger. But he was not put to the proof; he was only told that he must leave, and seeing Ellinor's extreme grief at the idea of their separation, he set himself to comfort her by every means in his power, reminding her, with tender choice of words, how necessary it was that he should remain on the spot, in Mr. Osbaldistone's service, in order to frustrate, by any small influence he might have, every project of alteration in the garden that contained the dreadful secret. He persisted in this view, though Ellinor repeated, with pertinacious anxiety, the care which Mr. Johnson had taken, in drawing up the lease, to provide against any change or alteration being made in the present disposition of the house or grounds.

People in general were rather astonished at the eagerness Miss Wilkins showed to sell all the Ford Bank furniture. Even Miss Monro was a little scandalised at this want of sentiment, although she said nothing about it; indeed justified the step, by telling every one how wisely Ellinor was acting, as the large, handsome tables and chairs would be very much out of place and keeping with the small, oddly-shaped rooms of their future home in East Chester Close. None knew how strong was the instinct of self-preservation, it may almost be called, which impelled Ellinor to shake off, at any cost of present pain, the incubus of a terrible remembrance. She wanted to go into an unhaunted dwelling in a free, unknown country—she felt as if it was her only chance of sanity. Sometimes she thought her senses would not hold together till the time when all these arrangements were ended. But she did not speak to any one about her feelings, poor child; to whom could she speak on the subject but to Dixon? Nor did she define them to herself.

All she knew was, that she was as nearly going mad as possible; and if she did, she feared that she might betray her father's guilt. All this time she never cried, or varied from her dull, passive demeanour. And they were blessed tears of relief that she shed when Miss Monro, herself weeping bitterly, told her to put her head out of the post-chaise window, for at the next turning of the road they would catch the last glimpse of Hamley church spire.

Late one October evening, Ellinor had her first sight of East Chester Close, where she was to pass the remainder of her life. Miss Monro had been backwards and forwards between Hamley and East Chester more than once, while Ellinor remained at the Parsonage; so she had not only the pride of proprietorship in the whole of the beautiful city, but something of the desire of hospitably welcoming Ellinor to their joint future home.

"Look! the fly must take us a long round, because of our luggage; but behind these high old walls are the canons' gardens. That high-pitched roof, with the clumps of stoncrop on the walls near it, is Canon Wilson's, whose four little girls I am to teach. Hark! the great cathedral clock. How proud I used to be of its great boom when I was a child! I thought all the other church clocks in the town sounded so shrill and poor after that, which I considered mine especially. There are rooks flying home to the elms in the Close. I wonder if they are the same that used to be there when I was a girl. They say the rook is a very long-lived bird, and I feel as if I could swear to the way they are cawing. Ay, you may smile, Ellinor, but I understand now those lines of Gray's you used to say so prettily—

"I feel the gales that from ye blow,
A momentary bliss bestow,
And breathe a second spring."

Now, dear, you must get out. This flagged walk leads to our front-door; but our back rooms, which are the pleasantest, look on to the Close, and the cathedral, and the lime-tree walk, and the deanery, and the rookery."

It was a mere slip of a house; the kitchen being wisely placed close to the front-door, and so reserving the pretty view for the little dining-room, out of which a glass-door opened into a small walled-in garden, which had again an entrance into the Close.

Upstairs was a bedroom to the front, which Miss Monro had taken for herself, because, as she said, she had old associations with the back of every house in the High Street, while Ellinor mounted to the pleasant chamber above the tiny drawing-room, both of which looked on to the vast and solemn cathedral, and the peaceful dignified Close. East Chester Cathedral is Norman, with a low, massive tower, a grand, majestic nave, and a choir full of stately historic tombs. The whole city is so quiet and decorous a place, that the perpetual daily chants and hymns of praise seemed to sound far and wide over the roofs of the houses. Ellinor soon became a regular attendant at all the morning and evening services. The sense of worship calmed and soothed her aching weary heart, and to be punctual to the cathedral hours she roused and exerted herself, when probably nothing else would have been sufficient to this end.

By-and-by Miss Monro formed many acquaintances; she picked up, or was picked up by, old friends, and the descendants of old friends. The grave and kindly canons, whose children she taught, called upon her with their wives, and talked over the former deans and chapters, of whom she had both a personal and traditional knowledge, and as they walked away and talked about her silent delicate-looking friend Miss Wilkins, and perhaps planned some little present out of their fruitful garden or bounteous stores, which should make Miss Monro's table a little more tempting to one apparently so frail as Ellinor, for the household was always spoken of as belonging to Miss Monro, the active and prominent person. By-and-by, Ellinor herself won her way to their hearts, not by words or deeds, but by her sweet looks and meek demeanour, as they marked her regular attendance at cathedral service; and when they heard of her constant visits to a certain parochial school, and of her being sometimes seen carrying a little covered basin to the cottages of the poor, they began to try and tempt her, with more urgent words, to accompany Miss Monro in her frequent tea-drinkings at their houses. The old dean, that courteous gentleman and good Christian, had early become great friends with Ellinor. He would watch at the windows of his great vaulted library till he saw her emerge from the garden into the Close, and then open the deanery door, and join her, she softly adjusting the measure of her pace to his. The time of his departure from East Chester became a great blank in her life, although she

would never accept, or allow Miss Monro to accept, his repeated invitations to go and pay him a visit at his country-place. Indeed, having once tasted comparative peace again in East Chester Cathedral Close, it seemed as though she was afraid of ever venturing out of those calm precincts. All Mr. Ness's invitations to visit him at his parsonage at Hamley were declined, although he was welcomed at Miss Monro's on the occasion of his annual visit, by every means in their power. He slept at one of the canon's vacant houses, and lived with his two friends, who made a yearly festivity, to the best of their means, in his honour, inviting such of the cathedral clergy as were in residence: or, if they failed, condescending to the town clergy. Their friends knew well that no presents were so acceptable as those sent while Mr. Ness was with them; and from the dean, who would send them a hamper of choice fruit and flowers from Oxton Park, down to the curate, who worked in the same schools as Ellinor, and who was a great fisher, and caught splendid trout—all did their best to help them to give a welcome to the only visitor they ever had. The only visitor they ever had, as far as the stately gentry knew. There was one, however, who came as often as his master could give him a holiday long enough to undertake a journey to so distant a place; but few knew of his being a guest at Miss Monro's, though his welcome there was not less hearty than Mr. Ness's—this was Dixon. Ellinor had convinced him that he could give her no greater pleasure at any time than by allowing her to frank him to and from East Chester. Whenever he came they were together the greater part of the day; she taking him hither and thither to see all the sights that she thought would interest or please him; but they spoke very little to each other during all this companionship. Miss Monro had much more to say to him. She questioned him right and left whenever Ellinor was out of the room. She learnt that the house at Ford Bank was splendidly furnished, and no money spared on the garden; that the eldest Miss Hanbury was very well married; that Brown had succeeded to Jones in the haberdasher's shop. Then she hesitated a little before making her next inquiry—

“I suppose Mr. Corbet never comes to the Parsonage now?”

“No, not he. I don't think as how Mr. Ness would have him; but they write letters to each other by times. Old Job—you'll recollect old Job, ma'am, he that gardened for Mr. Ness,

and waited in the parlour when there was company—did say as one day he heard them speaking about Mr. Corbet; and he's a grand counsellor now—one of them as goes about at assize-time, and speaks in a wig."

"A barrister, you mean," said Miss Monro.

"Ay; and he's something more than that, though I can't rightly remember what."

Ellinor could have told them both. They had the *Times* lent to them on the second day after publication by one of their friends in the Close, and Ellinor, watching till Miss Monro's eyes were otherwise engaged, always turned with trembling hands and a beating heart to the reports of the various courts of law. In them she found—at first rarely—the name she sought for, the name she dwelt upon, as if every letter were a study. Mr. Losh and Mr. Duncombe appeared for the plaintiff, Mr. Smythe and Mr. Corbet for the defendant. In a year or two that name appeared more frequently, and generally took the precedence of the other, whatever it might be; then on special occasions his speeches were reported at full length, as if his words were accounted weighty; and by-and-by she saw that he had been appointed a Queen's Counsel. And this was all she ever heard or saw about him; his once familiar name never passed her lips except in hurried whispers to Dixon, when he came to stay with them. Ellinor had had no idea when she parted from Mr. Corbet how total the separation between them was henceforward to be, so much seemed left unfinished, unexplained. It was so difficult, at first, to break herself of the habit of constant mental reference to him; and for many a long year she kept thinking that surely some kind fortune would bring them together again, and all this heart-sickness and melancholy estrangement from each other would then seem to both only as an ugly dream that had passed away in the morning light.

The dean was an old man, but there was a canon who was older still, and whose death had been expected by many, and speculated upon by some, any time for ten years at least. Canon Holdsworth was too old to show active kindness to any one; the good dean's life was full of thoughtful and benevolent deeds. But he was taken, and the other left. Ellinor looked out at the vacant deanery with tearful eyes, the last thing at night, the first in the morning. But it is pretty nearly the same with church dignitaries as with kings; the dean is dead, long live the dean!

A clergyman from a distant county was appointed, and all the Close was astir to learn and hear every particular connected with him. Luckily he came in at the tag-end of one of the noble families in the peerage; so, at any rate, all his future associates could learn with tolerable certainty that he was forty-two years of age, married, and with eight daughters and one son. The deanery, formerly so quiet and sedate a dwelling of the one old man, was now to be filled with noise and merriment. Iron railings were being placed before three windows, evidently to be the nursery. In the summer publicity of open windows and doors, the sound of the busy carpenters was perpetually heard all over the Close: and by-and-by waggon-loads of furniture and carriage-loads of people began to arrive. Neither Miss Monro nor Ellinor felt themselves of sufficient importance or station to call on the new-comers, but they were as well acquainted with the proceedings of the family as if they had been in daily intercourse; they knew that the eldest Miss Beauchamp was seventeen, and very pretty, only one shoulder was higher than the other; that she was dotingly fond of dancing, and talked a great deal in a *tête-à-tête*, but not much if her mamma was by, and never opened her lips at all if the dean was in the room; that the next sister was wonderfully clever, and was supposed to know all the governess could teach her, and to have private lessons in Greek and mathematics from her father; and so on down to the little boy at the preparatory school and the baby-girl in arms. Moreover, Miss Monro, at any rate, could have stood an examination as to the number of servants at the deanery, their division of work, and the hours of their meals. Presently, a very beautiful, haughty-looking young lady made her appearance in the Close, and in the dean's pew. She was said to be his niece, the orphan daughter of his brother, General Beauchamp, come to East Chester to reside for the necessary time before her marriage, which was to be performed in the cathedral by her uncle, the new dignitary. But as callers at the deanery did not see this beautiful bride elect, and as the Beauchamps had not as yet fallen into habits of intimacy with any of their new acquaintances, very little was known of the circumstances of this approaching wedding beyond the particulars given above.

Ellinor and Miss Monro sat at their drawing-room window, a little shaded by the muslin curtains, watching the busy preparations for the marriage, which was to take place the next day.

All morning long, hampers of fruit and flowers, boxes from the railway—for by this time East Chester had got a railway—shop messengers, hired assistants, kept passing backwards and forwards in the busy Close. Towards afternoon the bustle subsided, the scaffolding was up, the materials for the next day's feast carried out of sight. It was to be concluded that the bride elect was seeing to the packing of her trousseau, helped by the merry multitude of cousins, and that the servants were arranging the dinner for the day, or the breakfast for the morrow. So Miss Monro had settled it, discussing every detail and every probability as though she were a chief actor, instead of only a distant, uncared-for spectator of the coming event. Ellinor was tired, and now that there was nothing interesting going on, she had fallen back to her sewing, when she was startled by Miss Monro's exclamation—

“Look, look! here are two gentlemen coming along the lime-tree walk! it must be the bridegroom and his friend.” Out of much sympathy, and some curiosity, Ellinor bent forward, and saw, just emerging from the shadow of the trees on to the full afternoon sunlit pavement, Mr. Corbet and another gentleman; the former changed, worn, aged, though with still the same fine intellectual face, leaning on the arm of the younger taller man, and talking eagerly. The other gentleman was doubtless the bridegroom, Ellinor said to herself; and yet her prophetic heart did not believe her words. Even before the bright beauty at the deanery looked out of the great oriel window of the drawing-room, and blushed, and smiled, and kissed her hand—a gesture replied to by Mr. Corbet with much *empressement*, while the other man only took off his hat, almost as if he saw her there for the first time—Ellinor's greedy eyes watched him till he was hidden from sight in the deanery, unheeding Miss Monro's eager incoherent sentences, in turn entreating, apologising, comforting, and upbraiding. Then she slowly turned her painful eyes upon Miss Monro's face, and moved her lips without a sound being heard, and fainted dead away. In all her life she had never done so before, and when she came round she was not like herself; in all probability the persistence and wilfulness she, who was usually so meek and docile, showed during the next twenty-four hours, was the consequence of fever. She resolved to be present at the wedding; numbers were going; she would be unseen, unnoticed in the crowd; but whatever befell, go she

would, and neither the tears nor the prayers of Miss Monro could keep her back. She gave no reason for this determination ; indeed, in all probability she had none to give ; so there was no arguing the point. She was inflexible to entreaty, and no one had any authority over her, except, perhaps, distant Mr. Ness. Miss Monro had all sorts of forebodings as to the possible scenes that might come to pass. But all went on as quietly as though the fullest sympathy pervaded every individual of the great numbers assembled. No one guessed that the muffled, veiled figure, sitting in the shadow behind one of the great pillars, was that of one who had once hoped to stand at the altar with the same bridegroom, who now cast tender looks at the beautiful bride ; her veil white and fairy-like, Ellinor's black and shrouding as that of any nun.

Already Mr. Corbet's name was known through the country as that of a great lawyer ; people discussed his speeches and character far and wide ; and the well-informed in legal gossip spoke of him as sure to be offered a judgeship at the next vacancy. So he, though grave, and middle-aged, and somewhat grey, divided attention and remark with his lovely bride, and her pretty train of cousin bridesmaids. Miss Monro need not have feared for Ellinor : she saw and heard all things as in a mist—a dream ; as something she had to go through, before she could waken up to a reality of brightness in which her youth, and the hopes of her youth, should be restored, and all these weary years of dreaminess and woe should be revealed as nothing but the nightmare of a night. She sat motionless enough, still enough, Miss Monro by her, watching her as intently as a keeper watches a madman, and with the same purpose—to prevent any outburst even by bodily strength, if such restraint be needed. When all was over ; when the principal personages of the ceremony had filed into the vestry to sign their names ; when the swarm of townspeople were going out as swiftly as their individual notions of the restraints of the sacred edifice permitted ; when the great chords of the “ Wedding March ” clanged out from the organ, and the loud bells pealed overhead—Ellinor laid her hand in Miss Monro's. “ Take me home,” she said softly. And Miss Monro led her home as one leads the blind.



CHAPTER XII.

THERE are some people who imperceptibly float away from their youth into middle age, and thence pass into declining life with the soft and gentle motion of happy years. There are others who are whirled, in spite of themselves, down dizzy rapids of agony away from their youth at one great bound, into old age with another sudden shock ; and thence into the vast calm ocean where there are no shore-marks to tell of time.

This last, it seemed, was to be Ellinor's lot. Her youth had gone in a single night, fifteen years ago, and now she appeared to have become an elderly woman ; very still and hopeless in look and movement, but as sweet and gentle in speech and smile as ever she had been in her happiest days. All young people, when they came to know her, loved her dearly, though at first they might call her dull, and heavy to get on with ; and as for children and old people, her ready watchful sympathy in their joys as well as their sorrows was an unfailing passage to their hearts. After the first great shock of Mr. Corbet's marriage was over, she seemed to pass into a greater peace than she had known for years ; the last faint hope of happiness was gone ; it would, perhaps, be more accurate to say, of the bright happiness she had planned for herself in her early youth. Unconsciously, she was being weaned from self-seeking in any shape, and her daily life became, if possible, more innocent and pure and holy. One of the canons used to laugh at her for her constant attendance at all the services, and for her devotion to good works, and call her always the reverend sister. Miss Monro was a little annoyed at this faint clerical joke ; Ellinor smiled quietly. Miss Monro disapproved of Ellinor's grave ways and sober severe style of dress.

"You may be as good as you like, my dear, and yet go dressed in some pretty colour, instead of those perpetual blacks and greys, and then there would be no need for me to be perpetually telling people you are only four-and-thirty (and they don't believe me, though I tell them so till I am black in the face). Or if you would but wear a decent-shaped bonnet, instead of always wearing those of the poky shape in fashion when you were seventeen."

The old canon died, and some one was to be appointed in his

stead. These clerical preferments and appointments were the all-important interests to the inhabitants of the Close, and the discussion of probabilities came up invariably if any two met together in street or house, or even in the very cathedral itself. At length it was settled and announced by the higher powers. An energetic, hard-working clergyman from a distant part of the diocese, Livingstone by name, was to have the vacant canonry

Miss Monro said that the name was somehow familiar to her, and by degrees she recollected the young curate who had come to inquire after Ellinor in that dreadful illness she had had at Hamley in the year 1829. Ellinor knew nothing of that visit ; no more than Miss Monro did of what had passed between the two before that anxious night. Ellinor just thought it possible it might be the same Mr. Livingstone, and would rather it were not, because she did not feel as if she could bear the frequent though not intimate intercourse she must needs have, if such were the case, with one so closely associated with that great time of terror which she was striving to bury out of sight by every effort in her power. Miss Monro, on the contrary, was busy weaving a romance for her pupil ; she thought of the passionate interest displayed by the fair young clergyman fifteen years ago, and believed that occasionally men could be constant, and hoped that, if Mr. Livingstone were the new canon, he might prove the *rara avis* which exists but once in a century. He came, and it was the same. He looked a little stouter, a little older, but had still the gait and aspect of a young man. His smooth fair face was scarcely lined at all with any marks of care ; the blue eyes looked so kindly and peaceful that Miss Monro could scarcely fancy they were the same which she had seen fast filling with tears ; the bland calm look of the whole man needed the ennoblement of his evident devoutness to be raised into the type of holy innocence which some of the Romanists call the " sacerdotal face." His entire soul was in his work, and he looked as little likely to step forth in the character of either a hero of romance or a faithful lover as could be imagined. Still Miss Monro was not discouraged ; she remembered the warm, passionate feeling she had once seen break through the calm exterior, and she believed that what had happened once might occur again.

Of course, while all eyes were directed on the new canon, he had to learn who the possessors of those eyes were one by one ;

and it was probably some time before the idea came into his mind that Miss Wilkins, the lady in black, with the sad pale face, so constant an attendant at service, so regular a visitor at the school, was the same Miss Wilkins as the bright vision of his youth. It was her sweet smile at a painstaking child that betrayed her—if, indeed, betrayal it might be called where there was no wish or effort to conceal anything. Canon Livingstone left the schoolroom almost directly, and, after being for an hour or so in his house, went out to call on Mrs. Randall, the person who knew more of her neighbours' affairs than any one in East Chester.

The next day he called on Miss Wilkins herself. She would have been very glad if he had kept on in his ignorance; it was so keenly painful to be in the company of one the sight of whom, even at a distance, had brought her such a keen remembrance of past misery; and when told of his call, as she was sitting at her sewing in the dining-room, she had to nerve herself for the interview before going upstairs into the drawing-room, where he was being entertained by Miss Monro with warm demonstrations of welcome. A little contraction of the brow, a little compression of the lips, an increased pallor on Ellinor's part, was all that Miss Monro could see in her, though she had put on her glasses with foresight and intention to observe. She turned to the canon; his colour had certainly deepened as he went forwards with outstretched hand to meet Ellinor. That was all that was to be seen; but on the slight foundation of that blush, Miss Monro built many castles; and when they faded away, one after one, she recognised that they were only baseless visions. She used to put the disappointment of her hopes down to Ellinor's unvaried calmness of demeanour, which might be taken for coldness of disposition; and to her steady refusal to allow Miss Monro to invite Canon Livingstone to the small teas they were in the habit of occasionally giving. Yet he persevered in his calls; about once every fortnight he came, and would sit an hour or more, looking covertly at his watch, as if, as Miss Monro shrewdly observed to herself, he did not go away at last because he wished to do so, but because he ought. Sometimes Ellinor was present, sometimes she was away; in this latter case Miss Monro thought she could detect a certain wistful watching of the door every time a noise was heard outside the room. He always avoided any reference to former days at Hamley, and that, Miss Monro feared, was a bad sign.

After this long uniformity of years without any event closely touching on Ellinor's own individual life, with the one great exception of Mr. Corbet's marriage, something happened which much affected her. Mr. Ness died suddenly at his parsonage, and Ellinor learnt it first from Mr. Brown, a clergyman, whose living was near Hamley, and who had been sent for by the Parsonage servants as soon as they discovered that it was not sleep, but death, that made their master so late in rising.

Mr. Brown had been appointed executor by his late friend, and wrote to tell Ellinor that after a few legacies were paid, she was to have a life-interest in the remainder of the small property which Mr. Ness had left, and that it would be necessary for her, as the residuary legatee, to come to Hamley Parsonage as soon as convenient, to decide upon certain courses of action with regard to furniture, books, &c.

Ellinor shrank from this journey, which her love and duty towards her dead friend rendered necessary. She had scarcely left East Chester since she first arrived there, sixteen or seventeen years ago, and she was timorous about the very mode of travelling; and then to go back to Hamley, which she thought never to have seen again! She never spoke much about any feelings of her own, but Miss Monro could always read her silence, and interpreted it into pretty just and forcible words that afternoon when Canon Livingstone called. She liked to talk about Ellinor to him, and suspected that he liked to hear. She was almost annoyed this time by the comfort he would keep giving her; there was no greater danger in travelling by railroad than by coach, a little care about certain things was required, that was all, and the average number of deaths by accidents on railroads was not greater than the average number when people travelled by coach, if you took into consideration the far greater number of travellers. Yes! returning to the deserted scenes of one's youth was very painful. . . . Had Miss Wilkins made any provision for another lady to take her place as visitor at the school? He believed it was her week. Miss Monro was out of all patience at his entire calmness and reasonableness. Later in the day she became more at peace with him, when she received a kind little note from Mrs. Forbes, a great friend of hers, and the mother of the family she was now teaching, saying that Canon Livingstone had called and told her that Ellinor had to go on a very painful journey, and that Mrs.

Forbes was quite sure Miss Monro's companionship upon it would be a great comfort to both, and that she could perfectly be set at liberty for a fortnight or so, for it would fall in admirably with the fact that "Jeanie was growing tall, and the doctor had advised sea air this spring; so a month's holiday would suit them now even better than later on." Was this going straight to Mrs. Forbes, to whom she should herself scarcely have liked to name it, the act of a good, thoughtful man, or of a lover? questioned Miss Monro; but she could not answer her own inquiry, and had to be very grateful for the deed, without accounting for the motives.

A coach met the train at a station about ten miles from Hamley, and Dixon was at the inn where the coach stopped, ready to receive them.

The old man was almost in tears at the sight of them again in a familiar place. He had put on his Sunday clothes to do them honour; and to conceal his agitation he kept up a pretended bustle about their luggage. To the indignation of the inn-porters, who were of a later generation, he would wheel it himself to the Parsonage, though he broke down from fatigue once or twice on the way, and had to stand and rest, his ladies waiting by his side, and making remarks on the alterations of houses and the places of trees, in order to give him ample time to recruit himself, for there was no one to wait for them and give them a welcome to the Parsonage, which was to be their temporary home. The respectful servants, in deep mourning, had all prepared, and gave Ellinor a note from Mr. Brown, saying that he purposely refrained from disturbing them that day after their long journey, but would call on the morrow, and tell them of the arrangements he had thought of making, always subject to Miss Wilkins's approval.

These were simple enough; certain legal forms to be gone through, any selections from books or furniture to be made, and the rest to be sold by auction as speedily as convenient, as the successor to the living might wish to have repairs and alterations effected in the old parsonage. For some days Ellinor employed herself in business in the house, never going out except to church. Miss Monro, on the contrary, strolled about everywhere, noticing all the alterations in place and people, which were never improvements in her opinion. Ellinor had plenty of callers (her tenants, Mr. and Mrs. Osbaldistone, among others), but, except-

ing in rare cases—most of them belonged to humble life—she declined to see every one, as she had business enough on her hands: sixteen years makes a great difference in any set of people. The old acquaintances of her father in his better days were almost all dead or removed; there were one or two remaining, and these Ellinor received; one or two more, old and infirm, confined to their houses, she planned to call upon before leaving Hamley. Every evening, when Dixon had done his work at Mr. Osbaldistone's, he came up to the parsonage, ostensibly to help her in moving or packing books, but really because these two clung to each other—were bound to each other by a bond never to be spoken about. It was understood between them that once before Ellinor left she should go and see the old place, Ford Bank. Not to go into the house, though Mr. and Mrs. Osbaldistone had begged her to name her own time for revisiting it, when they and their family would be absent, but to see all the gardens and grounds once more; a solemn, miserable visit, which, because of the very misery it involved, appeared to Ellinor to be an imperative duty.

Dixon and she talked together as she sat making a catalogue one evening in the old low-browed library; the casement windows were open into the garden, and the May showers had brought out the scents of the new-leaved sweetbriar bush just below. Beyond the garden hedge the grassy meadows sloped away down to the river; the Parsonage was so much raised that, sitting in the house, you could see over the boundary hedge. Men with instruments were busy in the meadow. Ellinor, pausing in her work, asked Dixon what they were doing.

“Them's the people for the new railway,” said he. “Nought would satisfy the Hamley folk but to have a railway all to themselves—coaches isn't good enough now-a-days.”

He spoke with a tone of personal offence natural to a man who had passed all his life among horses, and considered railway-engines as their despicable rivals, conquering only by stratagem.

By-and-by Ellinor passed on to a subject the consideration of which she had repeatedly urged upon Dixon, and entreated him to come and form one of their household at East Chester. He was growing old, she thought, older even in looks and feelings than in years, and she would make him happy and comfortable in his declining years if he would but come and pass them under her care. The addition which Mr. Ness's bequest made to her

income would enable her to do not only this, but to relieve Miss Monro of her occupation of teaching; which, at the years she had arrived at, was becoming burdensome. When she proposed the removal to Dixon he shook his head.

"It's not that I don't thank you, and kindly, too; but I'm too old to go chopping and changing."

"But it would be no change to come back to me, Dixon," said Ellinor.

"Yes, it would. I were born i' Hamley, and it's i' Hamley I reckon to die."

On her urging him a little more, it came out that he had a strong feeling that if he did not watch the spot where the dead man lay buried, the whole would be discovered; and that this dread of his had often poisoned the pleasure of his visit to East Chester.

"I don't rightly know how it is, for I sometimes think if it wasn't for you, missy, I should be glad to have made it all clear before I go; and yet at times I dream, or it comes into my head as I lie awake with the rheumatics, that some one is there, digging; or that I hear 'em cutting down the tree; and then I get up and look out of the loft window—you'll mind the window over the stables, as looks into the garden, all covered over wi' the leaves of the jargonelle pear-tree? That were my room when first I come as stable-boy, and tho' Mr. Osbaldistone would fain give me a warmer one, I allays tell him I like th' old place best. And by times I've gotten up five or six times a-night to make sure as there was no one at work under the tree."

Ellinor shivered a little. He saw it, and restrained himself in the relief he was receiving from imparting his superstitious fancies.

"You see, missy, I could never rest a-nights if I didn't feel as if I kept the secret in my hand, and held it tight day and night, so as I could open my hand at any minute and see as it was there. No! my own little missy will let me come and see her now and again, and I know as I can allays ask her for what I want; and if it please God to lay me by, I shall tell her so, and she'll see as I want for nothing. But somehow I could ne'er bear leaving Hamley. You shall come and follow me to my grave when my time comes."

"Don't talk so, please, Dixon," said she.

"Nay, it'll be a mercy when I can lay me down and sleep in peace: though I sometimes fear as peace will not come to me even there." He was going out of the room, and was now more talking to himself than to her. "They say blood will out, and if it weren't for her part in it, I could wish for a clear breast before I die."

She did not hear the latter part of this mumbled sentence. She was looking at a letter just brought in and requiring an immediate answer. It was from Mr. Brown. Notes from him were of daily occurrence, but this contained an open letter the writing of which was strangely familiar to her—it did not need the signature "Ralph Corbet," to tell her whom the letter came from. For some moments she could not read the words. They expressed a simple enough request, and were addressed to the auctioneer who was to dispose of the rather valuable library of the late Mr. Ness, and whose name had been advertised in connection with the sale, in the *Athenæum*, and other similar papers. To him Mr. Corbet wrote, saying that he should be unable to be present when the books were sold, but that he wished to be allowed to buy in, at any price decided upon, a certain rare folio edition of Virgil, bound in parchment, and with notes in Italian. The book was fully described. Though no Latin scholar, Ellinor knew the book well—remembered its look from old times, and could instantly have laid her hand upon it. The auctioneer had sent the request on to his employer, Mr. Brown. That gentleman applied to Ellinor for her consent. She saw that the fact of the intended sale must be all that Mr. Corbet was aware of, and that he could not know to whom the books belonged. She chose out the book, and wrapped and tied it up with trembling hands. *He* might be the person to untie the knot. It was strangely familiar to her love, after so many years, to be brought into thus much contact with him. She wrote a short note to Mr. Brown, in which she requested him to say, as though from himself, and without any mention of her name, that he, as executor, requested Mr. Corbet's acceptance of the Virgil, as a remembrance of his former friend and tutor. Then she rang the bell, and gave the letter and parcel to the servant.

Again alone, and Mr. Corbet's open letter on the table. She took it up and looked at it till the letters dazzled crimson on the white paper. Her life rolled backwards, and she was a

girl again. At last she roused herself; but instead of destroying the note—it was long years since all her love-letters from him had been returned to the writer—she unlocked her little writing-case again, and placed this letter carefully down at the bottom, among the dead rose-leaves which embalmed the note from her father, found after his death under his pillow, the little golden curl of her sister's, the half-finished sewing of her mother.

The shabby writing-case itself was given her by her father long ago, and had since been taken with her everywhere. To be sure, her changes of place had been but few; but if she had gone to Nova Zembla, the sight of that little leather box on awaking from her first sleep, would have given her a sense of home. She locked the case up again, and felt all the richer for that morning.

A day or two afterwards she left Hamley. Before she went she compelled herself to go round the gardens and grounds of Ford Bank. She had made Mrs. Osbaldistone understand that it would be painful for her to re-enter the house; but Mr. Osbaldistone accompanied her in her walk.

"You see how literally we have obeyed the clause in the lease which ties us out from any alterations," said he, smiling. "We are living in a tangled thicket of wood. I must confess that I should have liked to cut down a good deal; but we do not do even the requisite thinnings without making the proper application for leave to Mr. Johnson. In fact, your old friend Dixon is jealous of every pea-stick the gardener cuts. I never met with so faithful a fellow. A good enough servant, too, in his way; but somewhat too old-fashioned for my wife and daughters, who complain of his being surly now and then."

"You are not thinking of parting with him?" said Ellinor, jealous for Dixon.

"Oh, no; he and I are capital friends. And I believe Mrs. Osbaldistone herself would never consent to his leaving us. But some ladies, you know, like a little more subserviency in manner than our friend Dixon can boast."

Ellinor made no reply. They were entering the painted flower garden, hiding the ghastly memory. She could not speak. She felt as if, with all her striving, she could not move—just as one does in a nightmare—but she was past the place even as this terror came to its acme; and when she came to herself, Mr. Osbaldistone was still blandly talking, and saying—

"It is now a reward for our obedience to your wishes, Miss Wilkins, for if the projected railway passes through the ash-field yonder we should have been perpetually troubled with the sight of the trains; indeed, the sound would have been much more distinct than it will be now coming through the interlacing branches. Then you will not go in, Miss Wilkins? Mrs. Osbaldistone desired me to say how happy—Ah! I can understand such feelings—Certainly, certainly; it is so much the shortest way to the town, that we elder ones always go through the stable-yard; for young people, it is perhaps not quite so desirable. Ha! Dixon," he continued, "on the watch for the Miss Ellinor we so often hear of! This old man," he continued to Ellinor, "is never satisfied with the seat of our young ladies, always comparing their way of riding with that of a certain missy"—

"I cannot help it, sir; they've quite a different style of hand, and sit all lumpish-like. Now, Miss Ellinor, there"—

"Hush, Dixon," she said, suddenly aware of why the old servant was not popular with his mistress. "I suppose I may be allowed to ask for Dixon's company for an hour or so; we have something to do together before we leave."

The consent given, the two walked away, as by previous appointment, to Hamley churchyard, where he was to point out to her the exact spot where he wished to be buried. Trampling over the long, rank grass, but avoiding passing directly over any of the thickly-strewn graves, he made straight for one spot—a little space of unoccupied ground close by, where Molly, the pretty scullery-maid, lay—

Sacred to the Memory of

MARY GREAVES,

Born 1797. Died 1818.

"We part to meet again."

"I put this stone up over her with my first savings," said he, looking at it; and then, pulling out his knife, he began to clean out the letters. "I said then as I would lie by her. And it'll be a comfort to think you'll see me laid here. I trust no one'll be so crabbed as to take a fancy to this 'ere spot of ground."

Ellinor grasped eagerly at the only pleasure which her money enabled her to give to the old man; and promised him that she would take care and buy the right to that particular piece of ground. This was evidently a gratification Dixon had frequently

yearned after; he kept saying, "I'm greatly obleeged to ye, Miss Ellinor. I may say I'm truly obleeged." And when he saw them off by the coach the next day, his last words were, "I cannot justly say how greatly I'm obleeged to you for that matter of the churchyard." It was a much more easy affair to give Miss Monro some additional comforts; she was as cheerful as ever; still working away at her languages in any spare time, but confessing that she was tired of the perpetual teaching in which her life had been spent during the last thirty years. Ellinor was now enabled to set her at liberty from this, and she accepted the kindness from her former pupil with as much simple gratitude as that with which a mother receives a favour from a child. "If Ellinor were but married to Canon Livingstone, I should be happier than I have ever been since my father died," she used to say to herself in the solitude of her bedchamber, for talking aloud had become her wont in the early years of her isolated life as a governess. "And yet," she went on, "I don't know what I should do without her; it is lucky for me that things are not in my hands, for a pretty mess I should make of them, one way or another. Dear! how old Mrs. Cadogan used to hate that word 'mess,' and correct her granddaughters for using it right before my face, when I knew I had said it myself only the moment before! Well! those days are all over now. God be thanked!"

In spite of being glad that "things were not in her hands," Miss Monro tried to take affairs into her charge by doing all she could to persuade Ellinor to allow her to invite the canon to their "little sociable teas." The most provoking part was, that she was sure he would have come if he had been asked; but she could never get leave to do so. "Of course no man could go on for ever and ever without encouragement," as she confided to herself in a plaintive tone of voice; and by-and-by many people were led to suppose that the bachelor canon was paying attention to Miss Forbes, the eldest daughter of the family to which the delicate Jeanie belonged. It was, perhaps, with the Forbesees that both Miss Monro and Ellinor were the most intimate of all the families in East Chester. Mrs. Forbes was a widow lady of good means, with a large family of pretty, delicate daughters. She herself belonged to one of the great houses in ———shire, but had married into Scotland; so, after her husband's death, it was the most natural thing in the world that she should settle in East Chester; and one after another of her daughters had become first

Miss Monro's pupil and afterwards her friend. Mrs. Forbes herself had always been strongly attracted by Ellinor, but it was long before she could conquer the timid reserve by which Miss Wilkins was hedged round. It was Miss Monro, who was herself incapable of jealousy, who persevered in praising them to one another, and in bringing them together; and now Ellinor was as intimate and familiar in Mrs. Forbes's household as she ever could be with any family not her own.

Mrs. Forbes was considered to be a little fanciful as to illness; but it was no wonder, remembering how many sisters she had lost by consumption. Miss Monro had often grumbled at the way in which her pupils were made irregular for very trifling causes. But no one so alarmed as she, when, in the autumn succeeding Mr. Ness's death, Mrs. Forbes remarked to her on Ellinor's increased delicacy of appearance, and shortness of breathing. From that time forwards she worried Ellinor (if any one so sweet and patient could ever have been worried) with respirators and precautions. Ellinor submitted to all her friend's wishes and cares, sooner than make her anxious, and remained a prisoner in the house through the whole of November. Then Miss Monro's anxiety took another turn. Ellinor's appetite and spirits failed her—not at all an unnatural consequence of so many weeks' confinement to the house. A plan was started, quite suddenly, one morning in December, that met with approval from every one but Ellinor, who was, however, by this time too languid to make much resistance.

Mrs. Forbes and her daughters were going to Rome for three or four months, so as to avoid the trying east winds of spring; why should not Miss Wilkins go with them? They urged it, and Miss Monro urged it, though with a little private sinking of the heart at the idea of the long separation from one who was almost like a child to her. Ellinor was, as it were, lifted off her feet and borne away by the unanimous opinion of others—the doctor included—who decided that such a step was highly desirable, if not absolutely necessary. She knew that she had only a life-interest both in her father's property and in that bequeathed to her by Mr. Ness. Hitherto she had not felt much trouble by this, as she had supposed that in the natural course of events she should survive Miss Monro and Dixon, both of whom she looked upon as dependent upon her. All she had to bequeath to the two was the small savings, which would not nearly suffice for

both purposes, especially considering that Miss Monro had given up her teaching, and that both she and Dixon were passing into years.

Before Ellinor left England she had made every arrangement for the contingency of her death abroad that Mr. Johnson could suggest. She had written and sent a long letter to Dixon; and a shorter one was left in charge of Canon Livingstone (she dared not hint at the possibility of her dying to Miss Monro) to be sent to the old man.

As they drove out of the King's Cross station, they passed a gentleman's carriage entering. Ellinor saw a bright, handsome lady, a nurse, and baby inside, and a gentleman sitting by them whose face she could never forget. It was Mr. Corbet taking his wife and child to the railway. They were going on a Christmas visit to East Chester deanery. He had been leaning back, not noticing the passers-by, not attending to the other inmates of the carriage, probably absorbed in the consideration of some law case. Such were the casual glimpses Ellinor had of one with whose life she had once thought herself bound up.

Who so proud as Miss Monro when a foreign letter came? Her correspondent was not particularly graphic in her descriptions, nor were there any adventures to be described, nor was the habit of mind of Ellinor such as to make her clear and definite in her own impressions of what she saw, and her natural reserve kept her from being fluent in communicating them even to Miss Monro. But that lady would have been pleased to read aloud these letters to the assembled dean and canons, and would not have been surprised if they had invited her to the chapter-house for that purpose. To her circle of untravelled ladies, ignorant of Murray, but laudably desirous of information, all Ellinor's historical reminiscences and rather formal details were really interesting. There was no railroad in those days between Lyons and Marçailles, so their progress was slow, and the passage of letters to and fro, when they had arrived in Rome, long and uncertain. But all seemed going on well. Ellinor spoke of herself as in better health; and Canon Livingstone (between whom and Miss Monro great intimacy had sprung up since Ellinor had gone away, and Miss Monro could ask him to tea) confirmed this report of Miss Wilkins's health from a letter which he had received from Mrs. Forbes. Curiosity about that letter was Miss Monro's torment. What could they have had to write

to each other about? It was a very odd proceeding; although the Livingstones and Forbesees were distantly related, after the manner of Scotland. Could it have been that he had offered to Euphemia, after all, and that her mother had answered; or, possibly, there was a letter from Effie herself, enclosed. It was a pity for Miss Monro's peace of mind that she did not ask him straight away. She would then have learnt what Canon Livingstone had no thought of concealing, that Mrs. Forbes had written solely to give him some fuller directions about certain charities than she had had time to think about in the hurry of starting. As it was, and when, a little later on, she heard him speak of the possibility of his going himself to Rome, as soon as his term of residence was over, in time for the Carnival, she gave up her fond project in despair, and felt very much like a child whose house of bricks had been knocked down by the unlucky waft of some passing petticoat.

Meanwhile, the entire change of scene brought on the exquisite refreshment of entire change of thought. Ellinor had not been able so completely to forget her past life for many years; it was like a renewing of her youth; cut so suddenly short by the shears of Fate. Ever since that night, she had had to rouse herself on awakening in the morning into a full comprehension of the great cause she had for much fear and heavy grief. Now, when she wakened in her little room, fourth piano, No. 36, Babuino, she saw the strange, pretty things around her, and her mind went off into pleasant wonder and conjecture, happy recollections of the day before, and pleasant anticipations of the day to come. Latent in Ellinor was her father's artistic temperament; everything new and strange was a picture and a delight; the merest group in the street, a Roman *facchino*, with his cloak draped over his shoulder, a girl going to market or carrying her pitcher back from the fountain, everything and every person that presented it or himself to her senses, gave them a delicious shock, as if it were something strangely familiar from Pinelli, but unseen by her mortal eyes before. She forgot her despondency, her ill-health disappeared as if by magic; the Misses Forbes, who had taken the pensive, drooping invalid as a companion out of kindness of heart, found themselves amply rewarded by the sight of her amended health, and her keen enjoyment of everything, and the half-quaint, half-naïve expressions of her pleasure.

So March came round ; Lent was late that year. The great nose-gays of violets and camellias were for sale at the corner of the Condotti, and the revellers had no difficulty in procuring much rarer flowers for the belles of the Corso. The embassies had their balconies ; the attachés of the Russian Embassy threw their light and lovely presents at every pretty girl, or suspicion of a pretty girl, who passed slowly in her carriage, covered over with her white domino, and holding her wire mask as a protection to her face from the showers of lime confetti, which otherwise would have been enough to blind her ; Mrs. Forbes had her own hired balcony, as became a wealthy and respectable Englishwoman. The girls had a great basket full of bouquets with which to pelt their friends in the crowd below ; a store of moccoletti lay piled on the table behind, for it was the last day of Carnival, and as soon as dusk came on the tapers were to be lighted, to be as quickly extinguished by every means in every one's power. The crowd below was at its wildest pitch ; the rows of stately contadini alone sitting immovable as their possible ancestors, the senators who received Brennus and his Gauls. Masks and white dominoes, foreign gentlemen, and the riffraff of the city, slow-driving carriages, showers of flowers, most of them faded by this time, every one shouting and struggling at that wild pitch of excitement which may so soon turn into fury. The Forbes girls had given place at the window to their mother and Ellinor, who were gazing half amused, half terrified, at the mad parti-coloured movement below ; when a familiar face looked up, smiling a recognition ; and "How shall I get to you?" was asked in English, by the well-known voice of Canon Livingstone. They saw him disappear under the balcony on which they were standing, but it was some time before he made his appearance in their room. And when he did, he was almost overpowered with greetings ; so glad were they to see an East Chester face.

"When did you come? Where are you? What a pity you did not come sooner! It is so long since we have heard anything ; do tell us everything! It is three weeks since we have had any letters ; those tiresome boats have been so irregular because of the weather." "How was everybody—Miss Monro in particular?" Ellinor asks.

He, quietly smiling, replied to their questions by slow degrees. He had only arrived the night before, and had been hunting for

them all day ; but no one could give him any distinct intelligence as to their whereabouts in all the noise and confusion of the place, especially as they had their only English servant with them, and the canon was not strong in his Italian. He was not sorry he had missed all but this last day of Carnival, for he was half blinded and wholly deafened, as it was. He was at the "Angleterre ;" he had left East Chester about a week ago ; he had letters for all of them, but had not dared to bring them through the crowd for fear of having his pocket picked. Miss Monro was very well, but very uneasy at not having heard from Ellinor for so long ; the irregularity of the boats must be telling both ways, for their English friends were full of wonder at not hearing from Rome. And then followed some well-deserved abuse of the Roman post, and some suspicion of the carelessness with which Italian servants posted English letters. All these answers were satisfactory enough, yet Mrs. Forbes thought she saw a latent uneasiness in Canon Livingstone's manner, and fancied once or twice that he hesitated in replying to Ellinor's questions. But there was no being quite sure in the increasing darkness, which prevented countenances from being seen ; nor in the constant interruptions and screams which were going on in the small crowded room, as wafting handkerchiefs, puffs of wind, or veritable extinguishers, fastened to long sticks, and coming from nobody knew where, put out taper after taper as fast as they were lighted.

"You will come home with us," said Mrs. Forbes. "I can only offer you cold meat with tea ; our cook is gone out, this being a universal festa ; but we cannot part with an old friend for any scruples as to the commissariat."

"Thank you. I should have invited myself if you had not been good enough to ask me."

When they had all arrived at their apartment in the Babuino (Canon Livingstone had gone round to fetch the letters with which he was intrusted), Mrs. Forbes was confirmed in her supposition that he had something particular and not very pleasant to say to Ellinor, by the rather grave and absent manner in which he awaited her return from taking off her out-of-door things. He broke off, indeed, in his conversation with Mrs. Forbes to go and meet Ellinor, and to lead her into the most distant window before he delivered her letters.

"From what you said in the balcony yonder, I fear you have not received your home letters regularly?"

"No!" replied she, startled and trembling, she hardly knew why.

"No more has Miss Monro heard from you; nor, I believe, has some one else who expected to hear. Your man of business—I forget his name."

"My man of business! Something has gone wrong, Mr. Livingstone. Tell me—I want to know. I have been expecting it—only tell me." She sat down suddenly, as white as ashes.

"Dear Miss Wilkins, I'm afraid it is painful enough, but you are fancying it worse than it is. All your friends are quite well; but an old servant"—

"Well!" she said, seeing his hesitation, and leaning forwards and gripping at his arm.

"Is taken up on a charge of manslaughter or murder. Oh! Mrs. Forbes, come here!"

For Ellinor had fainted, falling forwards on the arm she had held. When she came round she was lying half undressed on her bed; they were giving her tea in spoonfuls.

"I must get up," she moaned. "I must go home."

"You must lie still," said Mrs. Forbes firmly.

"You don't know. I must go home," she repeated; and she tried to sit up, but fell back helpless. Then she did not speak, but lay and thought. "Will you bring me some meat?" she whispered. "And some wine?" They brought her meat and wine; she ate, though she was choking. "Now, please, bring me my letters, and leave me alone; and after that I should like to speak to Canon Livingstone. Don't let him go, please. I won't be long—half-an-hour, I think. Only let me be alone."

There was a hurried feverish sharpness in her tone that made Mrs. Forbes very anxious, but she judged it best to comply with her requests.

The letters were brought, the lights were arranged so that she could read them lying on her bed; and they left her. Then she got up and stood on her feet, dizzy enough, her arms clasped at the top of her head, her eyes dilated and staring as if looking at some great horror. But after a few minutes she sat down suddenly, and began to read. Letters

were evidently missing. Some had been sent by an opportunity that had been delayed on the journey, and had not yet arrived in Rome. Others had been despatched by the post, but the severe weather, the unusual snow, had, in those days, before the railway was made between Lyons and Marseilles, put a stop to many a traveller's plans, and had rendered the transmission of the mail extremely uncertain; so, much of that intelligence which Miss Monro had evidently considered as certain to be known to Ellinor was entirely matter of conjecture, and could only be guessed at from what was told in these letters. One was from Mr. Johnson, one from Mr. Brown, one from Miss Monro; of course the last-mentioned was the first read. She spoke of the shock of the discovery of Mr. Dunster's body, found in the cutting of the new line of railroad from Hamley to the nearest railway station; the body so hastily buried long ago, in its clothes, by which it was now recognised—a recognition confirmed by one or two more personal and indestructible things, such as his watch and seal with his initials; of the shock to every one, the Osbaldistones in particular, on the further discovery of a fleam or horse-lancet, having the name of Abraham Dixon engraved on the handle; how Dixon had gone on Mr. Osbaldistone's business to a horse-fair in Ireland some weeks before this, and had had his leg broken by a kick from an unruly mare, so that he was barely able to move about when the officers of justice went to apprehend him in Tralee.

At this point Ellinor cried out loud and shrill.

"Oh, Dixon! Dixon! and I was away enjoying myself."

They heard her cry, and came to the door, but it was bolted inside.

"Please, go away," she said; "please, go. I will be very quiet; only, please, go."

She could not bear just then to read any more of Miss Monro's letter; she tore open Mr. Johnson's—the date was a fortnight earlier than Miss Monro's; he also expressed his wonder at not hearing from her, in reply to his letter of January 9; but he added, that he thought that her trustees had judged rightly; the handsome sum the railway company had offered for the land when their surveyor decided on the alteration of the line, Mr. Osbaldistone, &c. &c. She could not read any more; it was Fate pursuing her. Then she took the letter up again and tried

to read ; but all that reached her understanding was the fact that Mr. Johnson had sent his present letter to Miss Monro, thinking that she might know of some private opportunity safer than the post. Mr. Brown's was just such a letter as he occasionally sent her from time to time ; a correspondence that arose out of their mutual regard for their dead friend Mr. Ness. It, too, had been sent to Miss Monro to direct. Ellinor was on the point of putting it aside entirely, when the name of Corbet caught her eye : " You will be interested to hear that the old pupil of our departed friend, who was so anxious to obtain the folio Virgil with the Italian notes, is appointed the new judge in room of Mr. Justice Jenkin. At least I conclude that Mr. Ralph Corbet, Q.C., is the same as the Virgil fancier."

" Yes," said Ellinor bitterly ; " he judged well ; it would never have done." They were the first words of anything like reproach which she ever formed in her own mind during all these years. She thought for a few moments of the old times ; it seemed to steady her brain to think of them. Then she took up and finished Miss Monro's letter. That excellent friend had done all which she thought Ellinor would have wished without delay. She had written to Mr. Johnson, and charged him to do everything he could to defend Dixon, and to spare no expense. She was thinking of going to the prison in the county town, to see the old man herself, but Ellinor could perceive that all these endeavours and purposes of Miss Monro's were based on love for her own pupil, and a desire to set her mind at ease as far as she could, rather than from any idea that Dixon himself could be innocent. Ellinor put down the letters, and went to the door, then turned back, and locked them up in her writing-case with trembling hands ; and after that she entered the drawing-room, looking liker to a ghost than to a living woman.

" Can I speak to you for a minute alone ?" Her still, tuneless voice made the words into a command. Canon Livingstone arose and followed her into the little dining-room. " Will you tell me all you know—all you have heard about my—you know what ?"

" Miss Monro was my informant—at least at first—it was in the *Times* the day before I left. Miss Monro says it could only have been done in a moment of anger if the old servant is really guilty ; that he was as steady and good a man as she ever knew, and she seems to have a strong feeling against Mr. Dunster, as

always giving your father much unnecessary trouble; in fact, she hints that his disappearance at the time was supposed to be the cause of a considerable loss of property to Mr. Wilkins."

"No!" said Ellinor eagerly, feeling that some justice ought to be done to the dead man; and then she stopped short, fearful of saying anything that should betray her full knowledge. "I mean this," she went on; "Mr. Dunster was a very disagreeable man personally—and papa—we none of us liked him; but he was quite honest—please remember that."

The canon bowed, and said a few acquiescing words. He waited for her to speak again.

"Miss Monro says she is going to see Dixon in"——

"Oh, Mr. Livingstone, I can't bear it!"

He let her alone, looking at her pitifully, as she twisted and wrung her hands together in her endeavour to regain the quiet manner she had striven to maintain through the interview. She looked up at him with a poor attempt at an apologetic smile—

"It is so terrible to think of that good old man in prison!"

"You do not believe him guilty!" said Canon Livingstone, in some surprise. "I am afraid, from all I heard and read, there is but little doubt that he did kill the man; I trust in some moment of irritation, with no premeditated malice."

Ellinor shook her head.

"How soon can I get to England?" asked she. "I must start at once."

"Mrs. Forbes sent out while you were lying down. I am afraid there is no boat to Marseilles till Thursday, the day after to-morrow."

"But I must go sooner!" said Ellinor, starting up. "I must go; please help me. He may be tried before I can get there!"

"Alas! I fear that will be the case, whatever haste you make. The trial was to come on at the Hellingford Assizes, and that town stands first on the Midland Circuit list. To-day is the 27th of February; the assizes begin on the 7th of March."

"I will start to-morrow morning early for Civita; there may be a boat there they do not know of here. At any rate, I shall be on my way. If he dies, I must die too. Oh! I don't know what I am saying, I am so utterly crushed down! It would be such a kindness if you would go away, and let no one come to me. I know Mrs. Forbes is so good, she will forgive me. I

will say good-bye to you all before I go to-morrow morning ; but I must think now."

For one moment he stood looking at her as if he longed to comfort her by more words. He thought better of it, however, and silently left the room.

For a long time Ellinor sat still ; now and then taking up Miss Monro's letter, and re-reading the few terrible details. Then she bethought her that possibly the canon might have brought a copy of the *Times*, containing the examination of Dixon before the magistrates, and she opened the door and called to a passing servant to make the inquiry. She was quite right in her conjecture ; Dr. Livingstone had had the paper in his pocket during his interview with her ; but he thought the evidence so conclusive, that the perusal of it would only be adding to her extreme distress by accelerating the conviction of Dixon's guilt, which he believed she must arrive at sooner or later.

He had been reading the report over with Mrs. Forbes and her daughters, after his return from Ellinor's room, and they were all participating in his opinion upon it, when her request for the *Times* was brought. They had reluctantly agreed, saying there did not appear to be a shadow of doubt on the fact of Dixon's having killed Mr. Dunster, only hoping there might prove to be some extenuating circumstances, which Ellinor had probably recollected, and which she was desirous of producing on the approaching trial.



CHAPTER XIII.

ELLINOR, having read the report of Dixon's examination in the newspaper, bathed her eyes and forehead in cold water, and tried to still her poor heart's beating, that she might be clear and collected enough to weigh the evidence.

Every line of it was condemnatory. One or two witnesses spoke of Dixon's unconcealed dislike of Dunster, a dislike which Ellinor knew had been entertained by the old servant out of a species of loyalty to his master, as well as from personal distaste. The fleam was proved beyond all doubt to be Dixon's ; and a man, who had been stable-boy in Mr. Wilkins's service, swore that on the day when Mr. Dunster was missed, and when the whole

town was wondering what had become of him, a certain colt of Mr Wilkins's had needed bleeding, and that he had been sent by Dixon to the farrier's for a horse-lancet, an errand which he had remarked upon at the time, as he knew that Dixon had a fleam of his own.

Mr. Osbaldistone was examined. He kept interrupting himself perpetually to express his surprise at the fact of so steady and well-conducted a man as Dixon being guilty of so heinous a crime, and was willing enough to testify to the excellent character which he had borne during all the many years he had been in his (Mr. Osbaldistone's) service; but he appeared to be quite convinced by the evidence previously given of the prisoner's guilt in the matter, and strengthened the case against him materially by stating the circumstance of the old man's dogged unwillingness to have the slightest interference by cultivation with that particular piece of ground.

Here Ellinor shuddered. Before her, in that Roman bed-chamber, rose the fatal oblong she knew by heart—a little green moss or lichen, and thinly-growing blades of grass scarcely covering the caked and undisturbed soil under the old tree. Oh, that she had been in England when the surveyors of the railway between Ashcombe and Hamley had altered their line; she would have entreated, implored, compelled her trustees not to have sold that piece of ground for any sum of money whatever. She would have bribed the surveyors, done she knew not what—but now it was too late; she would not let her mind wander off to what might have been; she would force herself again to attend to the newspaper columns. There was little more: the prisoner had been asked if he could say anything to clear himself, and properly cautioned not to say anything to incriminate himself. The poor old man's person was described, and his evident emotion. "The prisoner was observed to clutch at the rail before him to steady himself, and his colour changed so much at this part of the evidence that one of the turnkeys offered him a glass of water, which he declined. He is a man of a strongly-built frame, and with rather a morose and sullen cast of countenance."

"My poor, poor Dixon!" said Ellinor, laying down the paper for an instant, and she was near crying, only she had resolved to shed no tears till she had finished all, and could judge of the chances. There were but a few lines more: "At one time the

prisoner seemed to be desirous of alleging something in his defence, but he changed his mind, if such had been the case, and in reply to Mr. Gordon (the magistrate) he only said, 'You've made a pretty strong case out against me, gentlemen, and it seems for to satisfy you; so I think I'll not disturb your minds by saying anything more.' Accordingly, Dixon now stands committed for trial for murder at the next Hellingford Assizes, which commence on March the seventh, before Baron Rushton and Mr. Justice Corbet."

"Mr. Justice Corbet!" The words ran through Ellinor as though she had been stabbed with a knife, and by an irrepressible movement she stood up rigid. 'The young man, her lover in her youth, the old servant who in those days was perpetually about her—the two who had so often met in familiar if not friendly relations, now to face each other as judge and accused! She could not tell how much Mr. Corbet had conjectured from the partial revelation she had made to him of the impending shame that hung over her and hers. A day or two ago she could have remembered the exact words she had used in that memorable interview; but now, strive as she would, she could only recall facts, not words. After all, the Mr. Justice Corbet might not be Ralph. There was one chance in a hundred against the identity of the two.

While she was weighing probabilities in her sick dizzy mind, she heard soft steps outside her bolted door, and low voices whispering. It was the bedtime of happy people with hearts at ease. Some of the footsteps passed lightly on; but there was a gentle rap at Ellinor's door. She pressed her two hot hands hard against her temples for an instant before she went to open the door. There stood Mrs. Forbes in her handsome evening dress, holding a lighted lamp in her hand.

"May I come in, my dear?" she asked. Ellinor's stiff dry lips refused to utter the words of assent which indeed did not come readily from her heart.

"I am so grieved at this sad news which the canon brings. I can well understand what a shock it must be to you; we have just been saying it must be as bad for you as it would be to us if our old Donald should turn out to have been a hidden murderer all these years that he has lived with us; I really could have as soon suspected Donald as that white-haired respectable old man who used to come and see you at East Chester."

Ellinor felt that she must say something. "It is a terrible shock—poor old man! and no friend near him, even Mr. Osbaldistone giving evidence against him. Oh, dear, dear, why did I ever come to Rome?"

"Now, my dear, you must not let yourself take an exaggerated view of the case. Sad and shocking as it is to have been so deceived, it is what happens to many of us, though not to so terrible a degree; and as to your coming to Rome having anything to do with it"—

(Mrs. Forbes almost smiled at the idea, so anxious was she to banish the idea of self-reproach from Ellinor's sensitive mind, but Ellinor interrupted her abruptly—)

"Mrs. Forbes! did he—did Canon Livingstone tell you that I must leave to-morrow? I must go to England as fast as possible to do what I can for Dixon."

"Yes, he told us you were thinking of it, and it was partly that made me force myself in upon you to-night. I think, my love, you are mistaken in feeling as if you were called upon to do more than what the canon tells me Miss Monro has already done in your name—engaged the best legal advice, and spared no expense to give the suspected man every chance. What could you do more even if you were on the spot? And it is very possible that the trial may have come on before you get home. Then what could you do? He would either have been acquitted or condemned; if the former, he would find public sympathy all in his favour; it always is for the unjustly accused. And if he turns out to be guilty, my dear Ellinor, it will be far better for you to have all the softening which distance can give to such a dreadful termination to the life of a poor man whom you have respected so long."

But Ellinor spoke again with a kind of irritated determination, very foreign to her usual soft docility—

"Please just let me judge for myself this once. I am not ungrateful. God knows I don't want to vex one who has been so kind to me as you have been, dear Mrs. Forbes; but I must go—and every word you say to dissuade me only makes me more convinced. I am going to Civita to-morrow. I shall be that much on the way. I cannot rest here."

Mrs. Forbes looked at her in grave silence. Ellinor could not bear the consciousness of that fixed gaze. Yet its fixity only arose from Mrs. Forbes' perplexity as to how best to

assist Ellinor, whether to restrain her by further advice—of which the first dose had proved so useless—or to speed her departure. Ellinor broke in on her meditations—

“You have always been so kind and good to me—go on being so—please, do! Leave me alone now, dear Mrs. Forbes, for I cannot bear talking about it, and help me to go to-morrow, and you do not know how I will pray to God to bless you!”

Such an appeal was irresistible. Mrs. Forbes kissed her very tenderly, and went to rejoin her daughters, who were clustered together in their mother's bedroom awaiting her coming.

“Well, mamma, how is she? What does she say?”

“She is in a very excited state, poor thing! and has got so strong an impression that it is her duty to go back to England and do all she can for this wretched old man, that I am afraid we must not oppose her. I am afraid that she really must go on Thursday.”

Although Mrs. Forbes secured the services of a travelling-maid, Dr. Livingstone insisted on accompanying Ellinor to England, and it would have required more energy than she possessed at this time to combat a resolution which both words and manner expressed as determined. She would much rather have travelled alone with her maid; she did not feel the need of the services he offered; but she was utterly listless and broken down; all her interest was centred in the thought of Dixon and his approaching trial, and perplexity as to the mode in which she must do her duty.

They embarked late that evening in the tardy *Santa Lucia*, and Ellinor immediately went to her berth. She was not seasick; that might possibly have lessened her mental sufferings, which all night long tormented her. High-perched in an upper berth, she did not like disturbing the other occupants of the cabin till daylight appeared. Then she descended and dressed, and went on deck; the vessel was just passing the rocky coast of Elba, and the sky was flushed with rosy light, that made the shadows on the island of the most exquisite purple. The sea still heaved with yesterday's storm, but the motion only added to the beauty of the sparkles and white foam that dimpled and curled on the blue waters. The air was delicious, after the closeness of the cabin, and Ellinor only wondered that more people were not on deck to enjoy it. One or two stragglers came up, time after time, and began pacing the deck. Dr.

Livingstone came up before very long ; but he seemed to have made a rule of not obtruding himself on Ellinor, excepting when he could be of some use. After a few words of commonplace morning greeting, he, too, began to walk backwards and forwards, while Ellinor sat quietly watching the lovely island receding fast from her view—a beautiful vision never to be seen again by her mortal eyes.

Suddenly there was a shock and stound all over the vessel, her progress was stopped, and a rocking vibration was felt everywhere. The quarter-deck was filled with blasts of steam, which obscured everything. Sick people came rushing up out of their berths in strange undress; the steerage passengers—a motley and picturesque set of people, in many varieties of gay costume—took refuge on the quarter-deck, speaking loudly in all varieties of French and Italian *patois*. Ellinor stood up in silent, wondering dismay. Was the *Santa Lucia* going down on the great deep, and Dixon unaided in his peril? Dr. Livingstone was by her side in a moment. She could scarcely see him for the vapour, nor hear him for the roar of the escaping steam.

“Do not be unnecessarily frightened,” he repeated, a little louder. “Some accident has occurred to the engines. I will go and make instant inquiry, and come back to you as soon as I can. Trust to me.”

He came back to where she sat trembling.

“A part of the engine is broken, through the carelessness of these Neapolitan engineers; they say we must make for the nearest port—return to Civita, in fact.”

“But Elba is not many miles away,” said Ellinor. “If this steam were but away, you could see it still.”

“And if we were landed there we might stay on the island for many days; no steamer touches there; but if we return to Civita, we shall be in time for the Sunday boat.”

“Oh, dear, dear!” said Ellinor. “To-day is the second—Sunday will be the fourth—the assizes begin on the seventh; how miserably unfortunate!”

“Yes!” he said, “it is. And these things always appear so doubly unfortunate when they hinder our serving others! But it does not follow that because the assizes begin at Hellingford on the seventh, Dixon’s trial will come on so soon. We may still get to Marseilles on Monday evening; on by diligence to

Lyons; it will—it must, I fear, be Thursday, at the earliest, before we reach Paris—Thursday, the eighth—and I suppose you know of some exculpatory evidence that has to be hunted up?”

He added this unwillingly; for he saw that Ellinor was jealous of the secrecy she had hitherto maintained as to her reasons for believing Dixon innocent; but he could not help thinking that she, a gentle, timid woman, unaccustomed to action or business, would require some of the assistance which he would have been so thankful to give her; especially as this untoward accident would increase the press of time in which what was to be done would have to be done.

But no. Ellinor scarcely replied to his half-inquiry as to her reasons for hastening to England. She yielded to all his directions, agreed to his plans, but gave him none of her confidence, and he had to submit to this exclusion from sympathy in the exact causes of her anxiety.

Once more in the dreary sala, with the gaudy painted ceiling, the bare dirty floor, the innumerable rattling doors and windows! Ellinor was submissive and patient in demeanour, because so sick and despairing at heart. Her maid was ten times as demonstrative of annoyance and disgust; she who had no particular reason for wanting to reach England, but who thought it became her dignity to make it seem as though she had.

At length the weary time was over; and again they sailed past Elba, and arrived at Marseilles. Now Ellinor began to feel how much assistance it was to her to have Dr. Livingstone for a “courier,” as he had several times called himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

“WHERE now?” said the canon, as they approached the London Bridge station.

“To the Great Western,” said she; “Hellingford is on that line, I see. But, please, now we must part.”

“Then I may not go with you to Hellingford? At any rate, you will allow me to go with you to the railway station, and do my last office as courier in getting you your ticket and placing you in the carriage.”

So they went together to the station, and learnt that no train was leaving for Hellingford for two hours. There was nothing for it but to go to the hotel close by, and pass away the time as best they could.

Ellinor called for her maid's accounts, and dismissed her. Some refreshment that the canon had ordered was eaten, and the table cleared. He began walking up and down the room, his arms folded, his eyes cast down. Every now and then he looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. When that showed that it only wanted a quarter of an hour to the time appointed for the train to start, he came up to Ellinor, who sat leaning her head upon her hand, her hand resting on the table.

"Miss Wilkins," he began—and there was something peculiar in his tone which startled Ellinor—"I am sure you will not scruple to apply to me if in any possible way I can help you in this sad trouble of yours?"

"No, indeed I won't!" said Ellinor gratefully, and putting out her hand as a token. He took it, and held it; she went on, a little more hastily than before: "You know you were so good as to say you would go at once and see Miss Monro, and tell her all you know, and that I will write to her as soon as I can."

"May I not ask for one line?" he continued, still holding her hand.

"Certainly: so kind a friend as you shall hear all I can tell; that is, all I am at liberty to tell."

"A friend! Yes, I am a friend; and I will not urge any other claim just now. Perhaps"——

Ellinor could not affect to misunderstand him. His manner implied even more than his words.

"No!" she said eagerly. "We are friends. That is it. I think we shall always be friends, though I will tell you now—something—this much—it is a sad secret. God help me! I am as guilty as poor Dixon, if, indeed, he is guilty—but he is innocent—indeed he is!"

"If he is no more guilty than you, I am sure he is! Let me be more than your friend, Ellinor—let me know all, and help you all that I can, with the right of an affianced husband."

"No, no!" said she, frightened both at what she had revealed, and his eager, warm, imploring manner. "That can never be. You do not know the disgrace that may be hanging over me."

"If that is all," said he, "I take my risk—if that is all—if you

only fear that I may shrink from sharing any peril you may be exposed to."

"It is not peril—it is shame and obloquy"—she murmured.

"Well! shame and obloquy. Perhaps, if I knew all, I could shield you from it."

"Don't, pray, speak any more about it now; if you do, I must say 'No.'"

She did not perceive the implied encouragement in these words; but he did, and they sufficed to make him patient.

The time was up, and he could only render her his last services as "courier," and none other but the necessary words at starting passed between them.

But he went away from the station with a cheerful heart; while she, sitting alone and quiet, and at last approaching near to the place where so much was to be decided, felt sadder and sadder, heavier and heavier.

All the intelligence she had gained since she had seen the *Galignani* in Paris, had been from the waiter at the Great Western Hotel, who, after returning from a vain search for an unoccupied *Times*, had volunteered the information that there was an unusual demand for the paper because of Hellingford Assizes, and the trial there for murder that was going on.

There was no electric telegraph in those days; at every station Ellinor put her head out, and inquired if the murder trial at Hellingford was ended. Some porters told her one thing, some another, in their hurry; she felt that she could not rely on them.

"Drive to Mr. Johnson's in the High Street—quick, quick. I will give you half-a-crown if you will go quick."

For, indeed, her endurance, her patience, was strained almost to snapping; yet at Hellingford station, where doubtless they could have told her the truth, she dared not ask the question. It was past eight o'clock at night. In many houses in the little country town there were unusual lights and sounds. The inhabitants were showing their hospitality to such of the strangers brought by the assizes, as were lingering there now that the business which had drawn them was over. The judges had left the town that afternoon, to wind up the circuit by the short list of a neighbouring county town.

Mr. Johnson was entertaining a dinner-party of attorneys when he was summoned from dessert by the announcement of a "lady who wanted to speak to him immediate and particular."

He went into his study in not the best of tempers. There he found his client, Miss Wilkins, white and ghastly, standing by the fireplace, with her eyes fixed on the door.

"It is you, Miss Wilkins! I am very glad"——

"Dixon!" said she. It was all she could utter.

Mr. Johnson shook his head.

"Ah; that's a sad piece of business, and I'm afraid it has shortened your visit at Rome."

"Is he"——

"Ay, I'm afraid there's no doubt of his guilt. At any rate, the jury found him guilty, and"——

"And!" she repeated quickly, sitting down, the better to hear the words that she knew were coming——

"He is condemned to death."

"When?"

"The Saturday but one after the judges left the town, I suppose——it's the usual time."

"Who tried him?"

"Judge Corbet; and, for a new judge, I must say I never knew one who got through his business so well. It was really as much as I could stand to hear him condemning the prisoner to death. Dixon was undoubtedly guilty, and he was as stubborn as could be—a sullen old fellow who would let no one help him through. I'm sure I did my best for him at Miss Monro's desire and for your sake. But he would furnish me with no particulars, help us to no evidence. I had the hardest work to keep him from confessing all before witnesses, who would have been bound to repeat it as evidence against him. Indeed, I never thought he would have pleaded 'Not Guilty.' I think it was only with a desire to justify himself in the eyes of some old Hamley acquaintances. Good God, Miss Wilkins! What's the matter? You're not fainting!" He rang the bell till the rope remained in his hands. "Here, Esther! Jerry! Whoever you are, come quick! Miss Wilkins has fainted! Water! Wine! Tell Mrs. Johnson to come here directly!"

Mrs. Johnson, a kind, motherly woman, who had been excluded from the "gentlemen's dinner-party," and had devoted her time to superintending the dinner her husband had ordered, came in answer to his call for assistance, and found Ellinor lying back in her chair white and senseless.

"Bessy, Miss Wilkins has fainted; she has had a long journey,

and is in a fidget about Dixon, the old fellow who was sentenced to be hung for that murder, you know. I can't stop here, I must go back to those men. You bring her round, and see her to bed. The blue room is empty since Horner left. She must stop here, and I'll see her in the morning. Take care of her, and keep her mind as easy as you can, will you, for she can do no good by fidgeting."

And, knowing that he left Ellinor in good hands, and with plenty of assistance about her, he returned to his friends.

Ellinor came to herself before long.

"It was very foolish of me, but I could not help it," said she apologetically.

"No; to be sure not, dear. Here, drink this; it is some of Mr. Johnson's best port wine that he has sent out on purpose for you. Or would you rather have some white soup—or what? We've had everything you could think of for dinner, and you've only to ask and have. And then you must go to bed, my dear—Mr. Johnson says you must; and there's a well-aired room, for Mr. Horner only left us this morning."

"I must see Mr. Johnson again, please."

"But indeed you must not. You must not worry your poor head with business now; and Johnson would only talk to you on business. No; go to bed, and sleep soundly, and then you'll get up quite bright and strong, and fit to talk about business."

"I cannot sleep—I cannot rest till I have asked Mr. Johnson one or two more questions; indeed I cannot," pleaded Ellinor.

Mrs. Johnson knew that her husband's orders on such occasions were peremptory, and that she should come in for a good conjugal scolding if, after what he had said, she ventured to send for him again. Yet Ellinor looked so entreating and wistful that she could hardly find in her heart to refuse her. A bright thought struck her.

"Here is pen and paper, my dear. Could you not write the questions you wanted to ask? and he'll just jot down the answers upon the same piece of paper. I'll send it in by Jerry. He has got friends to dinner with him, you see."

Ellinor yielded. She sat, resting her weary head on her hand, and wondering what were the questions which would have come so readily to her tongue could she have been face to face with him. As it was, she only wrote this—

"How early can I see you to-morrow morning? Will you

take all the necessary steps for my going to Dixon as soon as possible?— Could I be admitted to him to-night?"

The pencilled answers were—

"Eight o'clock. Yes. No."

"I suppose he knows best," said Ellinor, sighing, as she read the last word. "But it seems wicked in me to be going to bed—and he so near, in prison."

When she rose up and stood, she felt the former dizziness return, and that reconciled her to seeking rest before she entered upon the duties which were becoming clearer before her, now that she knew all and was on the scene of action. Mrs. Johnson brought her white-wine whey instead of the tea she had asked for; and perhaps it was owing to this that she slept so soundly.



CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Ellinor awoke the clear light of dawn was fully in the room. She could not remember where she was; for so many mornings she had wakened up in strange places that it took her several minutes before she could make out the geographical whereabouts of the heavy blue moreen curtains, the print of the lord-lieutenant of the county on the wall, and all the handsome ponderous mahogany furniture that stuffed up the room. As soon as full memory came into her mind, she started up; nor did she go to bed again, although she saw by her watch on the dressing-table that it was not yet six o'clock. She dressed herself with the dainty completeness so habitual to her that it had become an unconscious habit, and then—the instinct was irrepressible—she put on her bonnet and shawl, and went down, past the servant on her knees cleaning the doorstep, out into the fresh open air; and so she found her way down the High Street to Hellingford Castle, the building in which the courts of assize were held—the prison in which Dixon lay condemned to die. She almost knew she could not see him; yet it seemed like some amends to her conscience for having slept through so many hours of the night if she made the attempt. She went up to the porter's lodge, and asked the little girl sweeping out the place if she might see Abraham Dixon. The child stared at her, and ran into the house, bringing out her father, a great burly man,

who had not yet donned either coat or waistcoat, and who, consequently, felt the morning air as rather nipping. To him Ellinor repeated her question.

"Him as is to be hung come Saturday se'nnight? Why, ma'am, I've nought to do with it. You may go to the governor's house and try; but, if you'll excuse me, you'll have your walk for your pains. Them in the condemned cells is never seen by nobody without the sheriff's order. You may go up to the governor's house and welcome; but they'll only tell you the same. Yon's the governor's house."

Ellinor fully believed the man, and yet she went on to the house indicated, as if she still hoped that in her case there might be some exception to the rule, which she now remembered to have heard of before, in days when such a possible desire as to see a condemned prisoner was treated by her as a wish that some people might have, did have—people as far removed from her circle of circumstances as the inhabitants of the moon. Of course she met with the same reply, a little more abruptly given, as if every man was from his birth bound to know such an obvious regulation.

She went out past the porter, now fully clothed. He was sorry for her disappointment, but could not help saying, with a slight tone of exultation, "Well, you see I was right, ma'am!"

She walked as nearly round the castle as ever she could, looking up at the few high-barred windows she could see, and wondering in what part of the building Dixon was confined. Then she went into the adjoining churchyard, and sitting down upon a tombstone, she gazed idly at the view spread below her—a view which was considered as the lion of the place, to be shown to all strangers by the inhabitants of Hellingford. Ellinor did not see it, however; she only saw the blackness of that fatal night, the hurried work—the lanterns glancing to and fro. She only heard the hard breathing of those who are engaged upon unwonted labour; the few hoarse muttered words; the swaying of the branches to and fro. All at once the church clock above her struck eight, and then pealed out for distant labourers to cease their work for a time. Such was the old custom of the place. Ellinor rose up, and made her way back to Mr. Johnson's house in High Street. The room felt close and confined in which she awaited her interview with Mr. Johnson, who had sent down an apology for having overslept

himself, and at last made his appearance in a hurried half-awakened state, in consequence of his late hospitality of the night before.

"I am so sorry I gave you all so much trouble last night," said Ellinor apologetically. "I was over-tired, and much shocked by the news I heard."

"No trouble, no trouble, I am sure. Neither Mrs. Johnson nor I felt it in the least a trouble. Many ladies I know feel such things very trying, though there are others that can stand a judge's putting on the black cap better than most men. I'm sure I saw some as composed as could be under Judge Corbet's speech."

"But about Dixon? He must not die, Mr. Johnson."

"Well, I don't know that he will," said Mr. Johnson, in something of the tone of voice he would have used in soothing a child. "Judge Corbet said something about the possibility of a pardon. The jury did not recommend him to mercy: you see, his looks went so much against him, and all the evidence was so strong, and no defence, so to speak, for he would not furnish any information on which we could base defence. But the judge did give some hope, to my mind, though there are others that think differently."

"I tell you, Mr. Johnson, he must not die, and he shall not. To whom must I go?"

"Whew! Have you got additional evidence?" with a sudden sharp glance of professional inquiry.

"Never mind," Ellinor answered. "I beg your pardon . . . only tell me into whose hands the power of life and death has passed."

"Into the Home Secretary's—Sir Philip Homes; but you cannot get access to him on such an errand. It is the judge who tried the case that must urge a reprieve—Judge Corbet."

"Judge Corbet?"

"Yes; and he was rather inclined to take a merciful view of the whole case. I saw it in his charge. He'll be the person for you to see. I suppose you don't like to give me your confidence, or else I could arrange and draw up what will have to be said?"

"No. What I have to say must be spoken to the arbiter—to no one else. I am afraid I answered you impatiently just now. You must forgive me; if you knew all, I am sure you would."

"Say no more, my dear lady. We will suppose you have some evidence not adduced at the trial. Well; you must go up and see the judge, since you don't choose to impart it to any one, and lay it before him. He will doubtless compare it with his notes of the trial, and see how far it agrees with them. Of course you must be prepared with some kind of proof; for Judge Corbet will have to test your evidence."

"It seems strange to think of him as the judge," said Ellinor, almost to herself.

"Why, yes. He's but a young judge. You knew him at Hamley, I suppose? I remember his reading there with Mr. Ness."

"Yes, but do not let us talk more about that time. Tell me when can I see Dixon? I have been to the Castle already, but they said I must have a sheriff's order."

"To be sure. I desired Mrs. Johnson to tell you so last night. Old Ormerod was dining here; he is clerk to the magistrates, and I told him of your wish. He said he would see Sir Henry Croper, and have the order here before ten. But all this time Mrs. Johnson is waiting breakfast for us. Let me take you into the dining-room."

It was very hard work for Ellinor to do her duty as a guest, and to allow herself to be interested and talked to on local affairs by her host and hostess. But she felt as if she had spoken shortly and abruptly to Mr. Johnson in their previous conversation, and that she must try and make amends for it; so she attended to all the details about the restoration of the church, and the difficulty of getting a good music-master for the three little Miss Johnsons, with all her usual gentle good breeding and patience, though no one can tell how her heart and imagination were full of the coming interview with poor old Dixon.

By-and-by Mr. Johnson was called out of the room to see Mr. Ormerod, and receive the order of admission from him. Ellinor clasped her hands tight together as she listened with apparent composure to Mrs. Johnson's never-ending praise of the Hullah system. But when Mr. Johnson returned, she could not help interrupting her eulogy, and saying—

"Then I may go now?"

Yes, the order was there—she might go, and Mr. Johnson would accompany her, to see that she met with no difficulty or obstacle.

As they walked thither, he told her that some one—a turnkey, or some one—would have to be present at the interview; that such was always the rule in the case of condemned prisoners; but that if this third person was “obliging,” he would keep out of earshot. Mr. Johnson quietly took care to see that the turnkey who accompanied Ellinor was “obliging.”

The man took her across high-walled courts, along stone corridors, and through many locked doors, before they came to the condemned cells.

“I’ve had three at a time in here,” said he, unlocking the final door, “after Judge Morton had been here. We always called him the ‘Hanging Judge.’ But it’s five years since he died, and now there’s never more than one in at a time; though once it was a woman for poisoning her husband. Mary Jones was her name.”

The stone passage out of which the cells opened was light, and bare, and scrupulously clean. Over each door was a small barred window, and an outer window of the same description was placed high up in the cell, which the turnkey now opened.

Old Abraham Dixon was sitting on the side of his bed, doing nothing. His head was bent, his frame sunk, and he did not seem to care to turn round and see who it was that entered.

Ellinor tried to keep down her sobs while the man went up to him, and laying his hand on his shoulder, and lightly shaking him, he said—

“Here’s a friend come to see you, Dixon.” Then, turning to Ellinor, he added, “There’s some as takes it in this kind o’ stunned way, while others are as restless as a wild beast in a cage, after they’re sentenced.” And then he withdrew into the passage, leaving the door open, so that he could see all that passed if he chose to look, but ostentatiously keeping his eyes averted, and whistling to himself, so that he could not hear what they said to each other.

Dixon looked up at Ellinor, but then let his eyes fall on the ground again; the increasing trembling of his shrunken frame was the only sign he gave that he had recognised her.

She sat down by him, and took his large horny hand in hers. She wanted to overcome her inclination to sob hysterically before she spoke. She stroked the bony shrivelled fingers, on which her hot scalding tears kept dropping.

“Dunnot do that,” said he at length, in a hollow voice. “Dunnot take on about it; it’s best as it is, missy.”

"No, Dixon, it's not best. It shall not be. You know it shall not—cannot be."

"I'm rather tired of living. It's been a great strain and labour for me. I think I'd as lief be with God as with men. And you see, I were fond on him ever sin' he were a little lad, and told me what hard times he had at school, he did, just as if I were his brother! I loved him next to Molly Greaves. Dear! and I shall see her again, I reckon, come next Saturday week! They'll think well on me, up there, I'll be bound; though I cannot say as I've done all as I should do here below."

"But, Dixon," said Ellinor, "you know who did this—this"——

"Guilty o' murder," said he. "That's what they called it. Murder! And that it never were, choose who did it."

"My poor, poor father did it. I am going up to London this afternoon; I am going to see the judge, and tell him all."

"Don't you demean yourself to that fellow, missy. It's him as left you in the lurch as soon as sorrow and shame came nigh you."

He looked up at her now, for the first time; but she went on as if she had not noticed those wistful, weary eyes.

"Yes! I shall go to him. I know who it is; and I am resolved. After all, he may be better than a stranger, for real help; and I shall never remember any—anything else, when I think of you, good faithful friend."

"He looks but a wizened old fellow in his grey wig. I should hardly ha' known him. I gave him a look, as much as to say, 'I could tell tales o' you, my lord judge, if I chose.' I don't know if he heeded me, though. I suppose it were for a sign of old acquaintance that he said he'd recommend me to mercy. But I'd sooner have death nor mercy, by long odds. Yon man out there says mercy means Botany Bay. It 'ud be like killing me by inches, that would. It would. I'd liefer go straight to heaven, than live on among the black folk."

He began to shake again: this idea of transportation, from its very mysteriousness, was more terrifying to him than death. He kept on saying plaintively, "Missy, you'll never let 'em send me to Botany Bay; I couldn't stand that."

"No, no!" said she. "You shall come out of this prison, and go home with me to East Chester; I promise you you shall. I promise you. I don't yet quite know how, but trust in my

promise. Don't fret about Botany Bay. If you go there, I go too. I am so sure you will not go. And you know if you have done anything against the law in concealing that fatal night's work, I did too, and if you are to be punished, I will be punished too. But I feel sure it will be right; I mean as right as anything can be, with the recollection of that time present to us, as it must always be." She almost spoke these last words to herself. They sat on, hand in hand, for a few minutes more in silence.

"I thought you'd come to me. I knowed you were far away in foreign parts. But I used to pray to God. 'Dear Lord God!' I used to say, 'let me see her again.' I told the chaplain as I'd begin to pray for repentance, at after I'd done praying that I might see you once again: for it just seemed to take all my strength to say those words as I've named. And I thought as how God knew what was in my heart better than I could tell Him: how I was main and sorry for all as I'd ever done wrong; I allays were, at after it was done; but I thought as no one could know how bitter-keen I wanted to see you."

Again they sank into silence. Ellinor felt as if she would fain be away and active in procuring his release; but she also perceived how precious her presence was to him; and she did not like to leave him a moment before the time allowed her. His voice had changed to a weak, piping, old man's quaver, and between the times of his talking he seemed to relapse into a dreamy state; but through it all he held her hand tight, as though afraid that she would leave him.

So the hour elapsed, with no more spoken words than those above. From time to time Ellinor's tears dropped down upon her lap; she could not restrain them, though she scarce knew why she cried just then.

At length the turnkey said that the time allowed for the interview was ended. Ellinor spoke no word; but rose, and bent down and kissed the old man's forehead, saying—

"I shall come back to-morrow. God keep and comfort you!"

So, almost without an articulate word from him in reply (he rose up, and stood on his shaking legs, as she bade him farewell, putting his hand to his head with the old habitual mark of respect), she went her way, swiftly out of the prison, swiftly back with Mr. Johnson to his house, scarcely patient or strong enough in her hurry to explain to him fully all that she meant

to do. She only asked him a few absolutely requisite questions ; and informed him of her intention to go straight to London to see Judge Corbet.

Just before the railway carriage in which she was seated started on the journey, she bent forward, and put out her hand once more to Mr. Johnson. "To-morrow I will thank you for all," she said. "I cannot now."

It was about the same time that she had reached Hellingford on the previous night, that she arrived at the Great Western station on this evening—past eight o'clock. On the way she had remembered and arranged many things : one important question she had omitted to ask Mr. Johnson ; but that was easily remedied. She had not inquired where she could find Judge Corbet ; if she had, Mr. Johnson could probably have given her his professional address. As it was, she asked for a Post-Office Directory at the hotel, and looked out for his private dwelling—128 Hyde Park Gardens.

She rang for a waiter.

"Can I send a messenger to Hyde Park Gardens?" she said, hurrying on to her business, tired and worn-out as she was. "It is only to ask if Judge Corbet is at home this evening. If he is, I must go and see him."

The waiter was a little surprised, and would gladly have had her name to authorise the inquiry ; but she could not bear to send it ; it would be bad enough that first meeting, without the feeling that he, too, had had time to recall all the past days. Better to go in upon him unprepared, and plunge into the subject.

The waiter returned with the answer while she yet was pacing up and down the room restlessly, nerving herself for the interview.

"The messenger has been to Hyde Park Gardens, ma'am. The Judge and Lady Corbet are gone out to dinner."

Lady Corbet ! Of course Ellinor knew that he was married. Had she not been present at the wedding in East Chester Cathedral ? But, somehow, these recent events had so carried her back to old times, that the intimate association of the names, "the Judge and Lady Corbet," seemed to awaken her out of some dream.

"Oh, very well," she said, just as if these thoughts were not passing rapidly through her mind. "Let me be called at

seven to-morrow morning, and let me have a cab at the door to Hyde Park Gardens at eight."

And so she went to bed; but scarcely to sleep. All night long she had the scenes of those old times, the happy, happy days of her youth, the one terrible night that cut all happiness short, present before her. She could almost have fancied that she heard the long-silent sounds of her father's step, her father's way of breathing, the rustle of his newspaper as he hastily turned it over, coming through the lapse of years; the silence of the night. She knew that she had the little writing-case of her girlhood with her, in her box. The treasures of the dead that it contained, the morsel of dainty sewing, the little sister's golden curl, the half-finished letter to Mr. Corbet, were all there. She took them out, and looked at each separately; looked at them long—long and wistfully. "Will it be of any use to me?" she questioned of herself, as she was about to put her father's letter back into its receptacle. She read the last words over again, once more: "From my death-bed I adjure you to stand her friend; I will beg pardon on my knees for anything."

"I will take it," thought she. "I need not bring it out; most likely there will be no need for it, after what I shall have to say. All is so altered, so changed between us, as utterly as if it never had been, that I think I shall have no shame in showing it him, for my own part of it. While, if he sees poor papa's, dear, dear papa's suffering humility, it may make him think more gently of one who loved him once, though they parted in wrath with each other, I'm afraid."

So she took the letter with her when she drove to Hyde Park Gardens.

Every nerve in her body was in such a high state of tension that she could have screamed out at the cabman's boisterous knock at the door. She got out hastily, before any one was ready or willing to answer such an untimely summons; paid the man double what he ought to have had; and stood there, sick, trembling, and humble.

CHAPTER XVI. AND LAST.

"Is Judge Corbet at home? Can I see him?" she asked of the footman, who at length answered the door.

He looked at her curiously, and a little familiarly, before he replied—

"Why, yes! He's pretty sure to be at home at this time of day; but whether he'll see you is quite another thing."

"Would you be so good as to ask him? It is on very particular business."

"Can you give me a card? your name, perhaps, will do, if you have not a card. I say, Simmons" (to a lady's-maid crossing the hall), "is the judge up yet?"

"Oh yes! he's in his dressing-room this half-hour. My lady is coming down directly. It is just breakfast time."

"Can't you put it off, and come again, a little later?" said he, turning once more to Ellinor—white Ellinor! trembling Ellinor!

"No! please let me come in. I will wait. I am sure Judge Corbet will see me, if you will tell him I am here. Miss Wilkins. He will know the name."

"Well, then; will you wait here till I have got breakfast in?" said the man, letting her into the hall, and pointing to the bench there. He took her, from her dress, to be a lady's-maid or governess, or at most a tradesman's daughter; and, besides, he was behindhand with all his preparations. She came in and sat down.

"You will tell him I am here," she said faintly.

"Oh yes, never fear: I'll send up word, though I don't believe he'll come to you before breakfast."

He told a page, who ran upstairs, and, knocking at the judge's door, said that a Miss Jenkins wanted to speak to him.

"Who?" asked the judge from the inside.

"Miss Jenkins. She said you would know the name, sir."

"Not I. Tell her to wait."

So Ellinor waited. Presently down the stairs, with slow deliberate dignity, came the handsome Lady Corbet, in her rustling silks and ample petticoats, carrying her fine boy, and followed by her majestic nurse. She was ill-pleased that any

one should come and take up her husband's time when he was at home, and supposed to be enjoying domestic leisure; and her imperious, inconsiderate nature did not prompt her to any civility towards the gentle creature sitting down, weary and heart-sick, in her house. On the contrary, she looked her over as she slowly descended, till Ellinor shrank abashed from the steady gaze of the large black eyes. Then she, her baby and nurse, disappeared into the large dining-room, into which all the preparations for breakfast had been carried.

The next person to come down would be the judge. Ellinor instinctively put down her veil. She heard his quick decided step; she had known it well of old.

He gave one of his sharp, shrewd glances at the person sitting in the hall and waiting to speak to him, and his practised eye recognised the lady at once, in spite of her travel-worn dress.

"Will you just come into this room?" said he, opening the door of his study, to the front of the house: the dining-room was to the back; they communicated by folding-doors.

The astute lawyer placed himself with his back to the window; it was the natural position of the master of the apartment; but it also gave him the advantage of seeing his companion's face in full light. Ellinor lifted her veil; it had only been a dislike to a recognition in the hall which had made her put it down.

Judge Corbet's countenance changed more than hers; she had been prepared for the interview; he was not. But he usually had the full command of the expression on his face.

"Ellinor! Miss Wilkins! is it you?" And he went forwards, holding out his hand with cordial greeting, under which the embarrassment, if he felt any, was carefully concealed. She could not speak all at once in the way she wished.

"That stupid Henry told me 'Jenkins!' I beg your pardon. How could they put you down to sit in the hall? You must come in and have some breakfast with us; Lady Corbet will be delighted, I'm sure." His sense of the awkwardness of the meeting with the woman who was once to have been his wife, and of the probable introduction which was to follow to the woman who was his actual wife, grew upon him, and made him speak a little hurriedly. Ellinor's next words were a wonderful relief; and her soft gentle way of speaking was like the touch of a cooling balsam.

"Thank you, you must excuse me. I am come strictly on

business, otherwise I should never have thought of calling on you at such an hour. It is about poor Dixon."

"Ah! I thought as much!" said the judge, handing her a chair, and sitting down himself. He tried to compose his mind to business, but in spite of his strength of character, and his present efforts, the remembrance of old times would come back at the sound of her voice. He wondered if he was as much changed in appearance as she struck him as being in that first look of recognition; after that first glance he rather avoided meeting her eyes.

"I knew how much you would feel it. Some one at Hellingford told me you were abroad, in Rome, I think. But you must not distress yourself unnecessarily; the sentence is sure to be commuted to transportation, or something equivalent. I was talking to the Home Secretary about it only last night. Lapse of time and subsequent good character quite preclude any idea of capital punishment." All the time that he said this he had other thoughts at the back of his mind—some curiosity, a little regret, a touch of remorse, a wonder how the meeting (which, of course, would have to be some time) between Lady Corbet and Ellinor would go off; but he spoke clearly enough on the subject in hand, and no outward mark of distraction from it appeared.

Ellinor answered—

"I came to tell you, what I suppose may be told to any judge, in confidence and full reliance on his secrecy, that Abraham Dixon was not the murderer." She stopped short, and choked a little.

The judge looked sharply at her.

"Then you know who was?" said he.

"Yes," she replied, with a low, steady voice, looking him full in the face, with sad, solemn eyes.

The truth flashed into his mind. He shaded his face, and did not speak for a minute or two. Then he said, not looking up, a little hoarsely, "This, then, was the shame you told me of long ago?"

"Yes," said she.

Both sat quite still; quite silent for some time. Through the silence a sharp, clear voice was heard speaking through the folding-doors.

"Take the kedgerie down, and tell the cook to keep it hot

for the judge. It is so tiresome people coming on business here, as if the judge had not his proper hours for being at chambers."

He got up hastily, and went into the dining-room; but he had audibly some difficulty in curbing his wife's irritation.

When he came back, Ellinor said—

"I am afraid I ought not to have come here now."

"Oh! it's all nonsense!" said he, in a tone of annoyance. "You've done quite right." He seated himself where he had been before; and again half covered his face with his hand.

"And Dixon knew of this. I believe I must put the fact plainly to you—your father was the guilty person? He murdered Dunster?"

"Yes. If you call it murder. It was done by a blow, in the heat of passion. No one can ever tell how Dunster always irritated papa," said Ellinor, in a stupid heavy way; and then she sighed.

"How do you know this?" There was a kind of tender reluctance in the judge's voice, as he put all these questions. Ellinor had made up her mind beforehand that something like them must be asked, and must also be answered; but she spoke like a sleep-walker.

"I came into papa's room just after he had struck Mr. Dunster the blow. He was lying insensible, as we thought—dead, as he really was."

"What was Dixon's part in it? He must have known a good deal about it. And the horse-lancet that was found with his name upon it?"

"Papa went to wake Dixon, and he brought his fleam—I suppose to try and bleed him. I have said enough, have I not? I seem so confused. But I will answer any question to make it appear that Dixon is innocent."

The judge had been noting all down. He sat still now without replying to her. Then he wrote rapidly, referring to his previous paper from time to time. In five minutes or so he read the facts which Ellinor had stated, as he now arranged them, in a legal and connected form. He just asked her one or two trivial questions as he did so. Then he read it over to her, and asked her to sign it. She took up the pen, and held it, hesitating.

"This will never be made public?" said she.

"No; I shall take care that no one but the Home Secretary sees it."

"Thank you. I could not help it, now it has come to this."

"There are not many men like Dixon," said the judge, almost to himself, as he sealed the paper in an envelope.

"No," said Ellinor; "I never knew any one so faithful."

And just at the same moment the reflection on a less faithful person that these words might seem to imply struck both of them, and each instinctively glanced at the other.

"Ellinor!" said the judge, after a moment's pause, "we are friends, I hope?"

"Yes; friends," said she, quietly and sadly.

He felt a little chagrined at her answer. Why, he could hardly tell. To cover any sign of his feeling he went on talking.

"Where are you living now?"

"At East Chester."

"But you come sometimes to town, don't you? Let us know always—whenever you come; and Lady Corbet shall call on you. Indeed, I wish you'd let me bring her to see you to-day."

"Thank you. I am going straight back to Hellingford; at least, as soon as you can get me the pardon for Dixon."

He half smiled at her ignorance.

"The pardon must be sent to the sheriff, who holds the warrant for his execution. But, of course, you may have every assurance that it shall be sent as soon as possible. It is just the same as if he had it now."

"Thank you very much," said Ellinor, rising.

"Pray don't go without breakfast. If you would rather not see Lady Corbet just now, it shall be sent in to you in this room, unless you have already breakfasted."

"No, thank you; I would rather not. You are very kind, and I am very glad to have seen you once again. There is just one thing more," said she, colouring a little and hesitating. "This note to you was found under papa's pillow after his death; some of it refers to past things; but I should be glad if you could think as kindly as you can of poor papa—and so—if you will read it"—

He took it and read it, not without emotion. Then he laid it down on his table, and said—

"Poor man! he must have suffered a great deal for that night's work. And you, Ellinor, you have suffered, too."

Yes, she had suffered ; and he who spoke had been one of the instruments of her suffering, although he seemed forgetful of it. She shook her head a little for reply. Then she looked up at him—they were both standing at the time—and said—

“ I think I shall be happier now. I always knew it must be found out. Once more, good-bye, and thank you. I may take this letter, I suppose ? ” said she, casting envious loving eyes at her father's note, lying unregarded on the table.

“ Oh ! certainly, certainly, ” said he ; and then he took her hand ; he held it, while he looked into her face. He had thought it changed when he had first seen her, but it was now almost the same to him as of yore. The sweet shy eyes, the indicated dimple in the cheek, and something of fever had brought a faint pink flush into her usually colourless cheeks. Married judge though he was, he was not sure if she had not more charms for him still in her sorrow and her shabbiness than the handsome stately wife in the next room, whose looks had not been of the pleasantest when he left her a few minutes before. He sighed a little regretfully as Ellinor went away. He had obtained the position he had struggled for, and sacrificed for ; but now he could not help wishing that the slaughtered creature laid on the shrine of his ambition were alive again.

The kedgerie was brought up again, smoking hot, but it remained untasted by him ; and though he appeared to be reading the *Times*, he did not see a word of the distinct type. His wife, meanwhile, continued her complaints of the untimely visitor, whose name, he did not give to her in its corrected form, as he was not anxious that she should have it in her power to identify the call of this morning with a possible future acquaintance.

When Ellinor reached Mr. Johnson's house in Hellingford, that afternoon, she found Miss Monro was there, and that she had been with much difficulty restrained by Mr. Johnson from following her to London.

Miss Monro fondled and purred inarticulately through her tears over her recovered darling, before she could speak intelligibly enough to tell her that Canon Livingstone had come straight to see her immediately on his return to East Chester, and had suggested her journey to Hellingford, in order that she might be of all the comfort she could to Ellinor. She did not at first let out that he had accompanied her to Hellingford ; she was a little afraid of Ellinor's displeasure at his being there ; Ellinor had

always objected so much to any advance towards intimacy with him that Miss Monro had wished to make. But Ellinor was different now.

"How white you are, Nelly!" said Miss Monro. "You have been travelling too much and too fast, my child."

"My head aches!" said Ellinor wearily. "But I must go to the Castle, and tell my poor Dixon that he is reprieved—I am so tired! Will you ask Mr. Johnson to get me leave to see him? He will know all about it."

She threw herself down on the bed in the spare room; the bed with the heavy blue curtains. After an unheeded remonstrance, Miss Monro went to do her bidding. But it was now late afternoon, and Mr. Johnson said that it would be impossible for him to get permission from the sheriff that night.

"Besides," said he courteously, "one scarcely knows whether Miss Wilkins may not give the old man false hopes—whether she has not been excited to have false hopes herself; it might be a cruel kindness to let her see him, without more legal certainty as to what his sentence, or reprieve, is to be. By to-morrow morning, if I have properly understood her story, which was a little confused"—

"She is so dreadfully tired, poor creature," put in Miss Monro, who never could bear the shadow of a suspicion that Ellinor was not wisest, best, in all relations and situations of life.

Mr. Johnson went on, with a deprecatory bow: "Well, then—it really is the only course open to her besides—persuade her to rest for this evening. By to-morrow morning I will have obtained the sheriff's leave, and he will most likely have heard from London."

"Thank you! I believe that will be best."

"It is the only course," said he.

When Miss Monro returned to the bedroom, Ellinor was in a heavy feverish slumber; so feverish and so uneasy did she appear, that, after the hesitation of a moment or two, Miss Monro had no scruple in waking her.

But she did not appear to understand the answer to her request; she did not seem even to remember that she had made any request.

The journey to England, the misery, the surprises, had been too much for her. The morrow morning came, bringing the formal free pardon for Abraham Dixon. The sheriff's order for

her admission to see the old man lay awaiting her wish to use it ; but she knew nothing of all this.

For days, nay weeks, she hovered between life and death, tended, as of old, by Miss Monro, while good Mrs. Johnson was ever willing to assist.

One summer evening in early June she wakened into memory.

Miss Monro heard the faint piping voice, as she kept her watch by the bedside.

"Where is Dixon?" asked she.

"At the canon's house at Bromham." This was the name of Dr. Livingstone's country parish.

"Why?"

"We thought it better to get him into country air and fresh scenes at once."

"How is he?"

"Much better. Get strong, and he shall come to see you."

"You are sure all is right?" said Ellinor.

"Sure, my dear. All is quite right."

Then Ellinor went to sleep again, out of very weakness and weariness.

From that time she recovered pretty steadily. Her great desire was to return to East Chester as soon as possible. The associations of grief, anxiety, and coming illness, connected with Hellingford, made her wish to be once again in the solemn, quiet, sunny close of East Chester.

Canon Livingstone came over to assist Miss Monro in managing the journey with her invalid. But he did not intrude himself upon Ellinor, any more than he had done in coming from home.

The morning after her return, Miss Monro said—

"Do you feel strong enough to see Dixon?"

"Yes. Is he here?"

"He is at the canon's house. He sent for him from Bromham, in order that he might be ready for you to see him when you wished."

"Please let him come directly," said Ellinor, flushing and trembling.

She went to the door to meet the tottering old man ; she led him to the easy-chair that had been placed and arranged for herself ; she knelt down before him, and put his hands on her head, he trembling and shaking all the while.

"Forgive me all the shame and misery, Dixon. Say you for-

give me; and give me your blessing. And then let never a word of the terrible past be spoken between us."

"It's not for me to forgive you, as never did harm to no one"—

"But say you do—it will ease my heart."

"I forgive thee!" said he. And then he raised himself to his feet with effort, and, standing up above her, he blessed her solemnly.

After that he sat down, she by him, gazing at him.

"Yon's a good man, missy," he said at length, lifting his slow eyes and looking at her. "Better nor t'other ever was."

"He is a good man," said Ellinor.

But no more was spoken on the subject. The next day, Canon Livingstone made his formal call. Ellinor would fain have kept Miss Monro in the room, but that worthy lady knew better than to stop.

They went on, forcing talk on indifferent subjects. At last he could speak no longer on everything but that which he had most at heart. "Miss Wilkins!" (he had got up, and was standing by the mantelpiece, apparently examining the ornaments upon it)—"Miss Wilkins! is there any chance of your giving me a favourable answer now—you know what I mean—what we spoke about at the Great Western Hotel, that day?"

Ellinor hung her head.

"You know that I was once engaged before?"

"Yes! I know; to Mr. Corbet—he that is now the judge; you cannot suppose that would make any difference, if that is all. I have loved you, and you only, ever since we met, eighteen years ago. Miss Wilkins—Ellinor—put me out of suspense."

"I will!" said she, putting out her thin white hand for him to take and kiss, almost with tears of gratitude, but she seemed frightened at his impetuosity and tried to check him. "Wait—you have not heard all—my poor, poor father, in a fit of anger, irritated beyond his bearing, struck the blow that killed Mr. Dunster—Dixon and I knew of it, just after the blow was struck—we helped to hide it—we kept the secret—my poor father died of sorrow and remorse—you now know all—can you still love me? It seems to me as if I had been an accomplice in such a terrible thing!"

"Poor, poor Ellinor!" said he, now taking her in his arms

as a shelter. "How I wish I had known of all this years and years ago : I could have stood between you and so much !"

Those who pass through the village of Bromham, and pause to look over the laurel-hedge that separates the rectory garden from the road, may often see, on summer days, an old, old man, sitting in a wicker-chair, out upon the lawn. He leans upon his stick, and seldom raises his bent head ; but for all that his eyes are on a level with the two little fairy children who come to him in all their small joys and sorrows, and who learnt to lisp his name almost as soon as they did that of their father and mother.

Nor is Miss Monro often absent ; and although she prefers to retain the old house in the Close for winter quarters, she generally makes her way across to Canon Livingstone's residence every evening.

SO ENDS "A DARK NIGHT'S WORK."

COUSIN PHILLIS.

PART I.

IT is a great thing for a lad when he is first turned into the independence of lodgings. I do not think I ever was so satisfied and proud in my life as when, at seventeen, I sate down in a little three-cornered room above a pastry-cook's shop in the county town of Eltham. My father had left me that afternoon, after delivering himself of a few plain precepts, strongly expressed, for my guidance in the new course of life on which I was entering. I was to be a clerk under the engineer who had undertaken to make the little branch line from Eltham to Hornby. My father had got me this situation, which was in a position rather above his own in life; or perhaps I should say, above the station in which he was born and bred; for he was raising himself every year in men's consideration and respect. He was a mechanic by trade; but he had some inventive genius, and a great deal of perseverance, and had devised several valuable improvements in railway machinery. He did not do this for profit, though, as was reasonable, what came in the natural course of things was acceptable; he worked out his ideas, because, as he said, "until he could put them into shape, they plagued him by night and by day." But this is enough about my dear father; it is a good thing for a country where there are many like him. He was a sturdy Independent by descent and conviction; and this it was, I believe, which made him place me in the lodgings at the pastry-cook's. The shop was kept by the two sisters of our minister at home; and this was considered as a sort of safeguard to my morals, when I was turned loose upon the temptations of the county town, with a salary of thirty pounds a year.

My father had given up two precious days, and put on his Sunday clothes, in order to bring me to Eltham, and accompany

me first to the office, to introduce me to my new master (who was under some obligations to my father for a suggestion), and next to take me to call on the Independent minister of the little congregation at Eltham. And then he left me; and, though sorry to part with him, I now began to taste with relish the pleasure of being my own master. I unpacked the hamper that my mother had provided me with, and smelt the pots of preserve with all the delight of a possessor who might break into their contents at any time he pleased. I handled and weighed in my fancy the home-cured ham, which seemed to promise me interminable feasts; and, above all, there was the fine savour of knowing that I might eat of these dainties when I liked, at my sole will, not dependent on the pleasure of any one else, however indulgent. I stowed my eatables away in the little corner cupboard—that room was all corners, and everything was placed in a corner, the fireplace, the window, the cupboard; I myself seemed to be the only thing in the middle, and there was hardly room for me. The table was made of a folding leaf under the window, and the window looked out upon the market-place; so the studies for the prosecution of which my father had brought himself to pay extra for a sitting-room for me, ran a considerable chance of being diverted from books to men and women. I was to have my meals with the two elderly Miss Dawsons in the little parlour behind the three-cornered shop downstairs; my breakfasts and dinners at least, for, as my hours in an evening were likely to be uncertain, my tea or supper was to be an independent meal.

Then, after this pride and satisfaction, came a sense of desolation. I had never been from home before, and I was an only child; and though my father's spoken maxim had been, "Spare the rod, and spoil the child," yet, unconsciously, his heart had yearned after me, and his ways towards me were more tender than he knew, or would have approved of in himself could he have known. My mother, who never professed sternness, was far more severe than my father: perhaps my boyish faults annoyed her more; for I remember, now that I have written the above words, how she pleaded for me once in my riper years, when I had really offended against my father's sense of right.

But I have nothing to do with that now. It is about cousin Phillis that I am going to write, and as yet I am far enough from even saying who cousin Phillis was.

For some months after I was settled in Eltham, the new employment in which I was engaged—the new independence of my life—occupied all my thoughts. I was at my desk by eight o'clock, home to dinner at one, back at the office by two. The afternoon work was more uncertain than the morning's ; it might be the same, or it might be that I had to accompany Mr. Holdsworth, the managing engineer, to some point on the line between Eltham and Hornby. This I always enjoyed, because of the variety, and because of the country we traversed (which was very wild and pretty), and because I was thrown into companionship with Mr. Holdsworth, who held the position of hero in my boyish mind. He was a young man of five-and-twenty or so, and was in a station above mine, both by birth and education ; and he had travelled on the Continent, and wore mustachios and whiskers of a somewhat foreign fashion. I was proud of being seen with him. He was really a fine fellow in a good number of ways, and I might have fallen into much worse hands.

Every Saturday I wrote home, telling of my weekly doings—my father had insisted upon this ; but there was so little variety in my life that I often found it hard work to fill a letter. On Sundays I went twice to chapel, up a dark narrow entry, to hear droning hymns, and long prayers, and a still longer sermon, preached to a small congregation, of which I was, by nearly a score of years, the youngest member. Occasionally, Mr. Peters, the minister, would ask me home to tea after the second service. I dreaded the honour, for I usually sate on the edge of my chair all the evening, and answered solemn questions, put in a deep bass voice, until household prayer-time came, at eight o'clock, when Mrs. Peters came in, smoothing down her apron, and the maid-of-all-work followed, and first a sermon, and then a chapter was read, and a long impromptu prayer followed, till some instinct told Mr. Peters that supper-time had come, and we rose from our knees with hunger for our predominant feeling. Over supper the minister did unbend a little into one or two ponderous jokes, as if to show me that ministers were men, after all. And then at ten o'clock I went home, and enjoyed my long-repressed yawns in the three-cornered room before going to bed.

Dinah and Hannah Dawson, so their names were put on the board above the shop-door—I always called them Miss Dawson and Miss Hannah—considered these visits of mine to Mr. Peters

as the greatest honour a young man could have ; and evidently thought that if, after such privileges, I did not work out my salvation, I was a sort of modern Judas Iscariot. On the contrary, they shook their heads over my intercourse with Mr. Holdsworth. He had been so kind to me in many ways, that when I cut into my ham, I hovered over the thought of asking him to tea in my room, more especially as the annual fair was being held in Eltham market-place, and the sight of the booths, the merry-go-rounds, the wild-beast shows, and such country poms, was (as I thought at seventeen) very attractive. But when I ventured to allude to my wish in even distant terms, Miss Hannah caught me up, and spoke of the sinfulness of such sights, and something about wallowing in the mire, and then vaulted into France, and spoke evil of the nation, and all who had ever set foot therein, till, seeing that her anger was concentrating itself into a point, and that that point was Mr. Holdsworth, I thought it would be better to finish my breakfast, and make what haste I could out of the sound of her voice. I rather wondered afterwards to hear her and Miss Dawson counting up their weekly profits with glee, and saying that a pastry-cook's shop in the corner of the market-place, in Eltham fair week, was no such bad thing. However, I never ventured to ask Mr. Holdsworth to my lodgings.

There is not much to tell about this first year of mine at Eltham. But when I was nearly nineteen, and beginning to think of whiskers on my own account, I came to know cousin Phillis, whose very existence had been unknown to me till then. Mr. Holdsworth and I had been out to Heathbridge for a day, working hard. Heathbridge was near Hornby, for our line of railway was above half finished. Of course a day's outing was a great thing to tell about in my weekly letters ; and I fell to describing the country—a fault I was not often guilty of. I told my father of the bogs, all over wild myrtle and soft moss, and shaking ground over which we had to carry our line ; and how Mr. Holdsworth and I had gone for our mid-day meals—for we had to stay here for two days and a night—to a pretty village hard by, Heathbridge proper ; and how I hoped we should often have to go there, for the shaking, uncertain ground was puzzling our engineers—one end of the line going up as soon as the other was weighted down. (I had no thought for the shareholders' interests, as may be seen ; we had to make a new line on firmer ground before the junction railway was completed.) I told all this at

great length, thankful to fill up my paper. By return letter, I heard that a second cousin of my mother's was married to the Independent minister of Hornby, Ebenezer Holman by name, and lived at Heathbridge proper; the very Heathbridge I had described, or so my mother believed, for she had never seen her cousin Phillis Green, who was something of an heiress (my father believed), being her father's only child, and old Thomas Green had owned an estate of near upon fifty acres, which must have come to his daughter. My mother's feeling of kinship seemed to have been strongly stirred by the mention of Heathbridge; for my father said she desired me, if ever I went thither again, to make inquiry for the Reverend Ebenezer Holman; and if indeed he lived there, I was further to ask if he had not married one Phillis Green; and if both these questions were answered in the affirmative, I was to go and introduce myself as the only child of Margaret Manning, born Moneyppenny. I was enraged at myself for having named Heathbridge at all, when I found what it was drawing down upon me. One Independent minister, as I said to myself, was enough for any man; and here I knew (that is to say, I had been catechised on Sabbath mornings by) Mr. Hunter, our minister at home; and I had had to be civil to old Peters at Eltham, and behave myself for five hours running whenever he asked me to tea at his house; and now, just as I felt the free air blowing about me up at Heathbridge, I was to ferret out another minister, and I should perhaps have to be catechised by him, or else asked to tea at his house. Besides, I did not like pushing myself upon strangers, who perhaps had never heard of my mother's name, and such an odd name as it was—Moneyppenny; and if they had, had never cared more for her than she had for them, apparently, until this unlucky mention of Heathbridge.

Still, I would not disobey my parents in such a trifle, however irksome it might be. So the next time our business took me to Heathbridge, and we were dining in the little sanded inn-parlour, I took the opportunity of Mr. Holdsworth's being out of the room, and asked the questions which I was bidden to ask of the rosy-cheeked maid. I was either unintelligible or she was stupid; for she said she did not know, but would ask master; and of course the landlord came in to understand what it was I wanted to know; and I had to bring out all my stammering inquiries before Mr. Holdsworth, who would never have attended

to them, I dare say, if I had not blushed and blundered, and made such a fool of myself.

"Yes," the landlord said, "the Hope Farm was in Heathbridge proper, and the owner's name was Holman, and he was an Independent minister, and, as far as the landlord could tell, his wife's Christian name was Phillis; anyhow her maiden name was Green."

"Relations of yours?" asked Mr. Holdsworth.

"No, sir—only my mother's second cousins. Yes, I suppose they are relations. But I never saw them in my life."

"The Hope Farm is not a stone's throw from here," said the officious landlord, going to the window. "If you carry your eye over yon bed of hollyhocks, over the damson-trees in the orchard yonder, you may see a stack of queer-like stone chimneys. Them is the Hope Farm chimneys; it's an old place, though Holman keeps it in good order."

Mr. Holdsworth had risen from the table with more promptitude than I had, and was standing by the window, looking. At the landlord's last words, he turned round, smiling—"It is not often that parsons know how to keep land in order, is it?"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I must speak as I find; and minister Holman—we call the Church clergyman here 'parson,' sir; he would be a bit jealous if he heard a Dissenter called parson—minister Holman knows what he's about as well as e'er a farmer in the neighbourhood. He gives up five days a week to his own work, and two to the Lord's; and it is difficult to say which he works hardest at. He spends Saturday and Sunday a-writing sermons and a-visiting his flock at Hornby; and at five o'clock on Monday morning he'll be guiding his plough in the Hope Farm yonder just as well as if he could neither read nor write. But your dinner will be getting cold, gentlemen."

So we went back to table. After a while, Mr. Holdsworth broke the silence—"If I were you, Manning, I'd look up these relations of yours. You can go and see what they're like while we're waiting for Dobson's estimates, and I'll smoke a cigar in the garden meanwhile."

"Thank you, sir. But I don't know them, and I don't think I want to know them."

"What did you ask all those questions for, then?" said he, looking quickly up at me. He had no notion of doing or saying things without a purpose. I did not answer, so he continued—

“Make up your mind, and go off and see what this farmer-minister is like, and come back and tell me—I should like to hear.”

I was so in the habit of yielding to his authority, or influence, that I never thought of resisting, but went on my errand, though I remember feeling as if I would rather have had my head cut off. The landlord, who had evidently taken an interest in the event of our discussion in a way that country landlords have, accompanied me to the house-door, and gave me repeated directions, as if I was likely to miss my way in two hundred yards. But I listened to him, for I was glad of the delay, to screw up my courage for the effort of facing unknown people and introducing myself. I went along the lane, I recollect, switching at all the taller roadside weeds, till, after a turn or two, I found myself close in front of the Hope Farm. There was a garden between the house and the shady, grassy lane; I afterwards found that this garden was called the court; perhaps because there was a low wall round it, with an iron railing on the top of the wall, and two great gates between pillars crowned with stone balls for a state entrance to the flagged path leading up to the front door. It was not the habit of the place to go in either by these great gates or by the front door; the gates, indeed, were locked, as I found, though the door stood wide open. I had to go round by a side path lightly worn on a broad, grassy way, which led past the court-wall, past a horse-mount, half covered with stone-crop, and a little wild yellow fumitory, to another door—“the curate,” as I found it was termed by the master of the house, while the front door, “handsome and all for show,” was termed “the rector.” I knocked with my hand upon the “curate” door; a tall girl, about my own age, as I thought, came and opened it, and stood there silent, waiting to know my errand. I see her now—cousin Phillis. The westering sun shone full upon her, and made a slanting stream of light into the room within. She was dressed in dark blue cotton of some kind; up to her throat, down to her wrists, with a little frill of the same wherever it touched her white skin. And such a white skin as it was! I have never seen the like. She had light hair, nearer yellow than any other colour. She looked me steadily in the face with large, quiet eyes, wondering, but untroubled by the sight of a stranger. I thought it odd that so old, so full-grown as she was, she should wear a pinafore over her gown.

Before I had quite made up my mind what to say in reply to her mute inquiry of what I wanted there, a woman's voice called out, "Who is it, Phillis? If it is any one for butter-milk send them round to the back-door."

I thought I could rather speak to the owner of that voice than to the girl before me; so I passed her, and stood at the entrance of a room, hat in hand, for this side-door opened straight into the hall or house-place where the family sate when work was done. There was a brisk little woman of forty or so ironing some huge muslin cravats under the light of a long vine-shaded casement window. She looked at me distrustfully till I began to speak. "My name is Paul Manning," said I; but I saw she did not know the name. "My mother's name was Money-penny," said I—"Margaret Money-penny."

"And she married one John Manning, of Birmingham," said Mrs. Holman eagerly. "And you'll be her son. Sit down! I am right glad to see you. To think of your being Margaret's son! Why, she was almost a child not so long ago. Well, to be sure, it is five-and-twenty years ago. And what brings you into these parts?"

She sate down herself, as if oppressed by her curiosity as to all the five-and-twenty years that had passed by since she had seen my mother. Her daughter Phillis took up her knitting—a long grey worsted man's stocking, I remember—and knitted away without looking at her work. I felt that the steady gaze of those deep grey eyes was upon me, though once, when I stealthily raised mine to hers, she was examining something on the wall above my head.

When I had answered all my cousin Holman's questions, she heaved a long breath, and said, "To think of Margaret Money-penny's boy being in our house! I wish the minister was here. Phillis, in what field is thy father to-day?"

"In the five-acre; they are beginning to cut the corn."

"He'll not like being sent for, then, else I should have liked you to have seen the minister. But the five-acre is a good step off. You shall have a glass of wine and a bit of cake before you stir from this house, though. You're bound to go, you say, or else the minister comes in mostly when the men have their four o'clock."

"I must go—I ought to have been off before now."

"Here, then, Phillis, take the keys." She gave her daughter some whispered directions, and Phillis left the room.

"She is my cousin, is she not?" I asked. I knew she was, but somehow I wanted to talk of her, and did not know how to begin.

"Yes—Phillis Holman. She is our only child—now."

Either from that "now," or from a strange momentary wistfulness in her eyes, I knew that there had been more children, who were now dead.

"How old is cousin Phillis?" said I, scarcely venturing on the new name, it seemed too prettily familiar for me to call her by it; but cousin Holman took no notice of it, answering straight to the purpose.

"Seventeen last May-day; but the minister does not like to hear me calling it May-day," said she, checking herself with a little awe. "Phillis was seventeen on the first day of May last," she repeated in an emended edition.

"And I am nineteen in another month," thought I to myself; I don't know why.

Then Phillis came in, carrying a tray with wine and cake upon it.

"We keep a house-servant," said cousin Holman, "but it is churning-day, and she is busy." It was meant as a little proud apology for her daughter's being the handmaiden.

"I like doing it, mother," said Phillis, in her grave, full voice.

I felt as if I were somebody in the Old Testament—who, I could not recollect—being served and waited upon by the daughter of the host. Was I like Abraham's steward, when Rebekah gave him to drink at the well? I thought Isaac had not gone the pleasantest way to work in winning him a wife. But Phillis never thought about such things. She was a stately, gracious young woman, in the dress and with the simplicity of a child.

As I had been taught, I drank to the health of my new-found cousin and her husband; and then I ventured to name my cousin Phillis with a little bow of my head towards her; but I was too awkward to look and see how she took my compliment. "I must go, now," said I, rising.

Neither of the women had thought of sharing in the wine; cousin Holman had broken a bit of cake for form's sake.

"I wish the minister had been within," said his wife, rising too. Secretly I was very glad he was not. I did not take

kindly to ministers in those days, and I thought he must be a particular kind of man, by his objecting to the term May-day. But before I went, cousin Holman made me promise that I would come back on the Saturday following and spend Sunday with them ; when I should see something of "the minister."

"Come on Friday, if you can," were her last words as she stood at the curate-door, shading her eyes from the sinking sun with her hand.

Inside the house sate cousin Phillis, her golden hair, her dazzling complexion, lighting up the corner of the vine-shadowed room. She had not risen when I bade her good-bye ; she had looked at me straight as she said her tranquil words of farewell.

I found Mr. Holdsworth down at the line, hard at work superintending. As soon as he had a pause, he said, "Well, Manning, what are the new cousins like? How do preaching and farming seem to get on together? If the minister turns out to be practical as well as reverend, I shall begin to respect him."

But he hardly attended to my answer, he was so much more occupied with directing his workpeople. Indeed, my answer did not come very readily ; and the most distinct part of it was the mention of the invitation that had been given me.

"Oh ! of course you can go—and on Friday, too, if you like ; there is no reason why not this week ; and you've done a long spell of work this time, old fellow."

I thought that I did not want to go on Friday ; but when the day came, I found that I should prefer going to staying away, so I availed myself of Mr. Holdsworth's permission, and went over to Hope Farm some time in the afternoon, a little later than my last visit. I found the "curate" open to admit the soft September air, so tempered by the warmth of the sun that it was warmer out of doors than in, although the wooden log lay smouldering in front of a heap of hot ashes on the hearth. The vine-leaves over the window had a tinge more yellow, their edges were here and there scorched and browned ; there was no ironing about, and cousin Holman sate just outside the house, mending a shirt. Phillis was at her knitting indoors : it seemed as if she had been at it all the week. The many-speckled fowls were pecking about in the farmyard beyond, and the milk-cans glittered with brightness, hung out to sweeten. The court was

so full of flowers that they crept out upon the low-covered wall and horse-mount, and were even to be found self-sown upon the turf that bordered the path to the back of the house. I fancied that my Sunday coat was scented for days afterwards by the bushes of sweetbriar and the fraxinella that perfumed the air. From time to time cousin Holman put her hand into a covered basket at her feet, and threw handfuls of corn down for the pigeons that cooed and fluttered in the air around, in expectation of this treat.

I had a thorough welcome as soon as she saw me. "Now, this is kind—this is right down friendly," shaking my hand warmly. "Phillis, your cousin Manning is come!"

"Call me Paul, will you?" said I; "they call me so at home, and Manning in the office."

"Well; Paul, then. Your room is all ready for you, Paul; for, as I said to the minister, 'I'll have it ready whether he comes o' Friday or not.' And the minister said he must go up to the Ash-field whether you were to come or not; but he would come home betimes to see if you were here. I'll show you to your room, and you can wash the dust off a bit."

After I came down, I think she did not quite know what to do with me; or she might think that I was dull; or she might have work to do in which I hindered her; for she called Phillis, and bade her put on her bonnet, and go with me to the Ash-field, and find father. So we set off, I in a little flutter of a desire to make myself agreeable, but wishing that my companion were not quite so tall; for she was above me in height. While I was wondering how to begin our conversation, she took up the words.

"I suppose, cousin Paul, you have to be very busy at your work all day long in general?"

"Yes, we have to be in the office at half-past eight; and we have an hour for dinner, and then we go at it again till eight or nine."

"Then you have not much time for reading?"

"No," said I, with a sudden consciousness that I did not make the most of what leisure I had.

"No more have I. Father always gets an hour before going a-field in the mornings, but mother does not like me to get up so early."

"My mother is always wanting me to get up earlier when I am at home."

"What time do you get up?"

"Oh!—ah!—sometimes half-past six; not often though;" for I remembered only twice that I had done so during the past summer.

She turned her head, and looked at me.

"Father is up at three; and so was mother till she was ill. I should like to be up at four."

"Your father up at three! Why, what has he to do at that hour?"

"What has he not to do? He has his private exercise in his own room; he always rings the great bell which calls the men to milking; he rouses up Betty, our maid; as often as not he gives the horses their feed before the man is up—for Jem, who takes care of the horses, is an old man; and father is always loth to disturb him; he looks at the calves, and the shoulders, heels, traces, chaff, and corn before the horses go a-field; he has often to whip-cord the plough-whips; he sees the hogs fed; he looks into the swill-tubs, and writes his orders for what is wanted for food for man and beast; yes, and for fuel, too. And then, if he has a bit of time to spare, he comes in and reads with me—but only English; we keep Latin for the evenings, that we may have time to enjoy it; and then he calls in the man to breakfast, and cuts the boys' bread and cheese, and sees their wooden bottles filled, and sends them off to their work;—and by this time it is half-past six, and we have our breakfast. There is father!" she exclaimed, pointing out to me a man in his shirt-sleeves, taller by the head than the other two with whom he was working. We only saw him through the leaves of the ash-trees growing in the hedge, and I thought I must be confusing the figures, or mistaken: that man still looked like a very powerful labourer, and had none of the precise demureness of appearance which I had always imagined was the characteristic of a minister. It was the Reverend Ebenezer Holman, however. He gave us a nod as we entered the stubble-field; and I think he would have come to meet us but that he was in the middle of giving some directions to his men. I could see that Phillis was built more after his type than her mother's. He, like his daughter, was largely made, and of a fair, ruddy complexion, whereas hers was brilliant and delicate. His hair had been yellow or sandy, but now was grizzled. Yet his grey hairs betokened no failure in strength.

I never saw a more powerful man—deep chest, lean flanks, well-planted head. By this time we were nearly up to him; and he interrupted himself and stepped forwards; holding out his hand to me, but addressing Phillis.

“Well, my lass, this is cousin Manning, I suppose. Wait a minute, young man, and I’ll put on my coat, and give you a decorous and formal welcome. But—— Ned Hall, there ought to be a water-furrow across this land: it’s a nasty, stiff, clayey, dauby bit of ground, and thou and I must fall to, come next Monday—I beg your pardon, cousin Manning—and there’s old Jem’s cottage wants a bit of thatch; you can do that job to-morrow while I am busy.” Then, suddenly changing the tone of his deep bass voice to an odd suggestion of chapels and preachers, he added, “Now, I will give out the psalm, ‘Come all harmonious tongues,’ to be sung to ‘Mount Ephraim’ tune.”

He lifted his spade in his hand, and began to beat time with it; the two labourers seemed to know both words and music, though I did not; and so did Phillis: her rich voice followed her father’s as he set the tune; and the men came in with more uncertainty, but still harmoniously. Phillis looked at me once or twice with a little surprise at my silence; but I did not know the words. There we five stood, bareheaded, excepting Phillis, in the tawny stubble-field, from which all the shocks of corn had not yet been carried—a dark wood on one side, where the wood-pigeons were cooing; blue distance seen through the ash-trees on the other. Somehow, I think that if I had known the words, and could have sung, my throat would have been choked up by the feeling of the unaccustomed scene.

The hymn was ended, and the men had drawn off before I could stir. I saw the minister beginning to put on his coat, and looking at me with friendly inspection in his gaze, before I could rouse myself.

“I daresay you railway gentlemen don’t wind up the day with singing a psalm together,” said he; “but it is not a bad practice—not a bad practice. We have had it a bit earlier to-day for hospitality’s sake—that’s all.”

I had nothing particular to say to this, though I was thinking a great deal. From time to time I stole a look at my companion. His coat was black, and so was his waistcoat; neck-cloth he had none, his strong full throat being bare above the

snow-white shirt. He wore drab-coloured knee-breeches, grey worsted stockings (I thought I knew the maker), and strong-nailed shoes. He carried his hat in his hand, as if he liked to feel the coming breeze lifting his hair. After a while, I saw that the father took hold of the daughter's hand, and so, they holding each other, went along towards home. We had to cross a lane. In it there were two little children—one lying prone on the grass in a passion of crying; the other standing stock still, with its finger in its mouth, the large tears slowly rolling down its cheeks for sympathy. The cause of their distress was evident; there was a broken brown pitcher, and a little pool of spilt milk on the road.

"Hollo! hollo! What's all this?" said the minister. "Why, what have you been about, Tommy?" lifting the little petticoated lad, who was lying sobbing, with one vigorous arm. Tommy looked at him with surprise in his round eyes, but no affright—they were evidently old acquaintances.

"Mammy's jug!" said he at last, beginning to cry afresh.

"Well! and will crying piece mammy's jug, or pick up spilt milk? How did you manage it, Tommy?"

"He" (jerking his head at the other) "and me was running races."

"Tommy said he could beat me," put in the other.

"Now, I wonder what will make you two silly lads mind, and not run races again with a pitcher of milk between you," said the minister, as if musing. "I might flog you, and so save mammy the trouble; for I daresay she'll do it if I don't." The fresh burst of whimpering from both showed the probability of this. "Or I might take you to the Hope Farm, and give you some more milk; but then you'd be running races again, and my milk would follow that to the ground, and make another white pool. I think the flogging would be best—don't you?"

"We would never run races no more," said the elder of the two.

"Then you'd not be boys; you'd be angels."

"No, we shouldn't."

"Why not?"

They looked into each other's eyes for an answer to this puzzling question. At length, one said, "Angels is dead folk."

"Come; we'll not get too deep into theology. What do you think of my lending you a tin can with a lid to carry the milk home in? That would not break, at any rate; though I

would not answer for the milk not spilling if you ran races. That's it!"

He had dropped his daughter's hand, and now held out each of his to the little fellows. Phillis and I followed, and listened to the prattle which the minister's companions now poured out to him, and which he was evidently enjoying. At a certain point, there was a sudden burst of the tawny, ruddy-evening landscape. The minister turned round and quoted a line or two of Latin.

"It's wonderful," said he, "how exactly Virgil has hit the enduring epithets, nearly two thousand years ago, and in Italy; and yet how it describes to a T what is now lying before us in the parish of Heathbridge, county —, England."

"I dare say it does," said I, all aglow with shame, for I had forgotten the little Latin I ever knew.

The minister shifted his eyes to Phillis's face; it mutely gave him back the sympathetic appreciation that I, in my ignorance, could not bestow.

"Oh! this is worse than the catechism," thought I; "that was only remembering words."

"Phillis, lass, thou must go home with these lads, and tell their mother all about the race and the milk. Mammy must always know the truth," now speaking to the children. "And tell her, too, from me that I have got the best birch rod in the parish; and that if she ever thinks her children want a flogging she must bring them to me, and, if I think they deserve it, I'll give it them better than she can." So Phillis led the children towards the dairy, somewhere in the back-yard, and I followed the minister in through the "curate" into the house-place.

"Their mother," said he, "is a bit of a vixen, and apt to punish her children without rhyme or reason. I try to keep the parish rod as well as the parish bull."

He sat down in the three-cornered chair by the fireside, and looked around the empty room.

"Where's the missus?" said he to himself. But she was there in a minute; it was her regular plan to give him his welcome home—by a look, by a touch, nothing more—as soon as she could after his return, and he had missed her now. Regardless of my presence, he went over the day's doings to her; and then, getting up, he said he must go and make himself "reverend," and that then we would have a cup of tea in the parlour. The parlour was a large room with two casemented windows on the

other side of the broad flagged passage leading from the rector-door to the wide staircase, with its shallow, polished oaken steps, on which no carpet was ever laid. The parlour-floor was covered in the middle by a home-made carpeting of needlework and list. One or two quaint family pictures of the Holman family hung round the walls; the fire-grate and irons were much ornamented with brass; and on a table against the wall between the windows, a great beau-pot of flowers was placed upon the folio volumes of Matthew Henry's Bible. It was a compliment to me to use this room, and I tried to be grateful for it; but we never had our meals there after that first day, and I was glad of it; for the large house-place, living-room, dining-room, whichever you might like to call it, was twice as comfortable and cheerful. There was a rug in front of the great large fireplace, and an oven by the grate, and a crook, with the kettle hanging from it, over the bright wood-fire; everything that ought to be black and polished in that room was black and polished; and the flags, and window-curtains, and such things as were to be white and clean, were just spotless in their purity. Opposite to the fireplace, extending the whole length of the room, was an oaken shovel-board, with the right incline for a skilful player to send the weights into the prescribed space. There were baskets of white work about, and a small shelf of books hung against the wall, books used for reading, and not for propping up a beau-pot of flowers. I took down one or two of those books once when I was left alone in the house-place on the first evening—Virgil, Cæsar, a Greek grammar—oh, dear! ah, me! and Phillis Holman's name in each of them! I shut them up, and put them back in their places, and walked as far away from the bookshelf as I could. Yes, and I gave my cousin Phillis a wide berth, although she was sitting at her work quietly enough, and her hair was looking more golden, her dark eyelashes longer, her round pillar of a throat whiter than ever. We had done tea, and we had returned into the house-place that the minister might smoke his pipe without fear of contaminating the drab damask window-curtains of the parlour. He had made himself "reverend" by putting on one of the voluminous white muslin neckcloths that I had seen cousin Holman ironing that first visit I had paid to the Hope Farm, and by making one or two other unimportant changes in his dress. He sate looking steadily at me, but whether he saw me or not I cannot tell. At the time I fancied that he did, and

was gauging me in some unknown fashion in his secret mind. Every now and then he took his pipe out of his mouth, knocked out the ashes, and asked me some fresh question. As long as these related to my acquirements or my reading, I shuffled uneasily and did not know what to answer. By-and-by he got round to the more practical subject of railroads, and on this I was more at home. I really had taken an interest in my work; nor would Mr. Holdsworth, indeed, have kept me in his employment if I had not given my mind as well as my time to it; and I was, besides, full of the difficulties which beset us just then, owing to our not being able to find a steady bottom on the Heathbridge moss, over which we wished to carry our line. In the midst of all my eagerness in speaking about this, I could not help being struck with the extreme pertinence of his questions. I do not mean that he did not show ignorance of many of the details of engineering: that was to have been expected; but on the premises he had got hold of, he thought clearly and reasoned logically. Phillis—so like him as she was both in body and mind—kept stopping at her work and looking at me, trying to fully understand all that I said. I felt she did; and perhaps it made me take more pains in using clear expressions, and arranging my words, than I otherwise should.

"She shall see I know something worth knowing, though it mayn't be her dead-and-gone languages," thought I.

"I see," said the minister at length. "I understand it all. You've a clear, good head of your own, my lad—choose how you came by it."

"From my father," said I proudly. "Have you not heard of his discovery of a new method of shunting? It was in the *Gazette*. It was patented. I thought every one had heard of Manning's patent winch."

"We don't know who invented the alphabet," said he, half smiling, and taking up his pipe.

"No, I dare say not, sir," replied I, half offended; "that's so long ago."

Puff—puff—puff.

"But your father must be a notable man. I heard of him once before; and it is not many a one fifty miles away whose fame reaches Heathbridge."

"My father is a notable man, sir. It is not me that says so; it is Mr. Holdsworth, and—and everybody."

"He is right to stand up for his father," said cousin Holman, as if she were pleading for me.

I chafed inwardly, thinking that my father needed no one to stand up for him. He was man sufficient for himself.

"Yes—he is right," said the minister placidly. "Right, because it comes from his heart—right, too, as I believe in point of fact. Else there is many a young cockerel that will stand upon a dunghill and crow about his father, by way of making his own plumage to shine. I should like to know thy father," he went on, turning straight to me, with a kindly, frank look in his eyes.

But I was vexed, and would take no notice. Presently, having finished his pipe, he got up and left the room. Phillis put her work hastily down, and went after him. In a minute or two she returned, and sate down again. Not long after, and before I had quite recovered my good temper, he opened the door out of which he had passed, and called to me to come to him. I went across a narrow stone passage into a strange, many-cornered room, not ten feet in area, part study, part counting-house, looking into the farmyard; with a desk to sit at, a desk to stand at, a spittoon, a set of shelves with old divinity books upon them; another, smaller, filled with books on farriery, farming, manures, and such subjects, with pieces of paper containing memoranda stuck against the whitewashed walls with wafers, nails, pins, anything that came readiest to hand; a box of carpenter's tools on the floor, and some manuscripts in shorthand on the desk.

He turned round half laughing. "That foolish girl of mine thinks I have vexed you,"—putting his large, powerful hand on my shoulder. "'Nay,' says I; 'kindly meant is kindly taken'—is it not so?"

"It was not quite, sir," replied I, vanquished by his manner; "but it shall be in future."

"Come, that's right. You and I shall be friends. Indeed, it's not many a one I would bring in here. But I was reading a book this morning, and I could not make it out; it is a book that was left here by mistake one day; I had subscribed to Brother Robinson's sermons; and I was glad to see this instead of them, for sermons though they be, they're . . . well, never mind! I took 'em both, and made my old coat do a bit longer; but all's fish that comes to my net. I have fewer books than

leisure to read them, and I have a prodigious big appetite. Here it is."

It was a volume of stiff mechanics, involving many technical terms, and some rather deep mathematics. These last, which would have puzzled me, seemed easy enough to him; all that he wanted was the explanations of the technical words, which I could easily give.

While he was looking through the book to find the places where he had been puzzled, my wandering eye caught on some of the papers on the wall, and I could not help reading one, which has stuck by me ever since. At first, it seemed a kind of weekly diary; but then I saw that the seven days were portioned out for special prayers and intercessions: Monday for his family, Tuesday for enemies, Wednesday for the Independent churches, Thursday for all other churches, Friday for persons afflicted, Saturday for his own soul, Sunday for all wanderers and sinners, that they might be brought home to the fold.

We were called back into the house-place to have supper. A door opening into the kitchen was opened; and all stood up in both rooms, while the minister, tall, large, one hand resting on the spread table, the other lifted up, said, in the deep voice that would have been loud had it not been so full and rich, but with the peculiar accent or twang that I believe is considered devout by some people, "Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, let us do all to the glory of God."

The supper was an immense meat pie. We of the house-place were helped first; then the minister hit the handle of his buckhorn carving-knife on the table once, and said—

"Now or never," which meant, did any of us want any more; and when we had all declined, either by silence or by words, he knocked twice with his knife on the table, and Betty came in through the open door, and carried off the great dish to the kitchen, where an old man and a young one, and a help-girl, were awaiting their meal.

"Shut the door, if you will," said the minister to Betty.

"That's in honour of you," said cousin Holman, in a tone of satisfaction, as the door was shut. "When we've no stranger with us, the minister is so fond of keeping the door open, and talking to the men and maids, just as much as to Phillis and me."

"It brings us all together, like a household, just before we meet as a household in prayer," said he in explanation. "But

to go back to what we were talking about—can you tell me of any simple book on dynamics that I could put in my pocket, and study a little at leisure times in the day?"

"Leisure times, father?" said Phillis, with a nearer approach to a smile than I had yet seen on her face.

"Yes; leisure times, daughter. There is many an odd minute lost in waiting for other folk; and now that railroads are coming so near us, it behoves us to know something about them."

I thought of his own description of his "prodigious big appetite" for learning. And he had a good appetite of his own for the more material victual before him. But I saw, or fancied I saw, that he had some rule for himself in the matter both of food and drink.

As soon as supper was done the household assembled for prayer. It was a long impromptu evening prayer; and it would have seemed desultory enough had I not had a glimpse of the kind of day that preceded it, and so been able to find a clue to the thoughts that preceded the disjointed utterances; for he kept there kneeling down in the centre of a circle, his eyes shut, his outstretched hands pressed palm to palm—sometimes with a long pause of silence, as if waiting to see if there was anything else he wished to "lay before the Lord" (to use his own expression)—before he concluded with the blessing. He prayed for the cattle and live creatures, rather to my surprise; for my attention had begun to wander, till it was recalled by the familiar words.

And here I must not forget to name an odd incident at the conclusion of the prayer, and before we had risen from our knees (indeed, before Betty was well awake, for she made a nightly practice of having a sound nap, her weary head lying on her stalwart arms); the minister, still kneeling in our midst, but with his eyes wide open, and his arms dropped by his side, spoke to the elder man, who turned round on his knees to attend. "John, didst see that Daisy had her warm mash to-night; for we must not neglect the means, John,—two quarts of gruel, a spoonful of ginger, and a gill of beer—the poor beast needs it, and I fear it slipped out of my mind to tell thee; and here was I asking a blessing and neglecting the means, which is a mockery," said he, dropping his voice.

Before we went to bed he told me he should see little or nothing more of me during my visit, which was to end on Sunday evening,

as he always gave up both Saturday and Sabbath to his work in the ministry. I remembered that the landlord at the inn had told me this on the day when I first inquired about these new relations of mine; and I did not dislike the opportunity which I saw would be afforded me of becoming more acquainted with cousin Holman and Phillis, though I earnestly hoped that the latter would not attack me on the subject of the dead languages.

I went to bed, and dreamed that I was as tall as cousin Phillis, and had a sudden and miraculous growth of whisker, and a still more miraculous acquaintance with Latin and Greek. Alas! I wakened up still a short, beardless lad, with "*tempus fugit*" for my sole remembrance of the little Latin I had once learnt. While I was dressing, a bright thought came over me: I could question cousin Phillis, instead of her questioning me, and so manage to keep the choice of the subjects of conversation in my own power.

Early as it was, every one had breakfasted, and my basin of bread and milk was put on the oven-top to await my coming down. Every one was gone about their work. The first to come into the house-place was Phillis with a basket of eggs. Faithful to my resolution, I asked—

"What are those?"

She looked at me for a moment, and then said gravely—

"Potatoes!"

"No! they are not," said I. "They are eggs. What do you mean by saying they are potatoes?"

"What do you mean by asking me what they were, when they were plain to be seen?" retorted she.

We were both getting a little angry with each other.

"I don't know. I wanted to begin to talk to you; and I was afraid you would talk to me about books as you did yesterday. I have not read much; and you and the minister have read so much."

"I have not," said she. "But you are our guest; and mother says I must make it pleasant to you. We won't talk of books. What must we talk about?"

"I don't know. How old are you?"

"Seventeen last May. How old are you?"

"I am nineteen. Older than you by nearly two years," said I, drawing myself up to my full height.

"I should not have thought you were above sixteen," she

replied, as quietly as if she were not saying the most provoking thing she possibly could. Then came a pause.

"What are you going to do now?" asked I.

"I should be dusting the bed-chambers; but mother said I had better stay and make it pleasant to you," said she, a little plaintively, as if dusting rooms was far the easiest task.

"Will you take me to see the live-stock? I like animals, though I don't know much about them."

"Oh, do you. I am so glad. I was afraid you would not like animals, as you did not like books."

I wondered why she said this. I think it was because she had begun to fancy all our tastes must be dissimilar. We went together all through the farmyard; we fed the poultry, she kneeling down with her pinafore full of corn and meal, and tempting the little timid, downy chickens upon it, much to the anxiety of the fussy ruffled hen, their mother. She called to the pigeons, who fluttered down at the sound of her voice. She and I examined the great sleek cart-horses; sympathised in our dislike of pigs; fed the calves, coaxed the sick cow, Daisy; and admired the others out at pasture; and came back tired and hungry and dirty at dinner-time, having quite forgotten that there were such things as dead languages, and consequently capital friends.



·PART II.

COUSIN HOLMAN gave me the weekly county newspaper to read aloud to her, while she mended stockings out of a high piled-up basket, Phillis helping her mother. I read and read, unregardful of the words I was uttering, thinking of all manner of other things; of the bright colour of Phillis's hair, as the afternoon sun fell on her bending head; of the silence of the house, which enabled me to hear the double tick of the old clock which stood half-way up the stairs; of the variety of inarticulate noises which cousin Holman made while I read, to show her sympathy, wonder, or horror at the newspaper intelligence. The tranquil monotony of that hour made me feel as if I had lived for ever, and should live for ever droning out paragraphs in that warm sunny room, with my two quiet hearers, and the curled-up pussy cat sleeping on the hearthrug, and the clock on the house-stairs

perpetually clicking out the passage of the moments. By-and-by Betty the servant came to the door into the kitchen, and made a sign to Phillis, who put her half-mended stocking down, and went away to the kitchen without a word. Looking at cousin Holman a minute or two afterwards, I saw that she had dropped her chin upon her breast, and had fallen fast asleep. I put the newspaper down, and was nearly following her example, when a waft of air from some unseen source slightly opened the door of communication with the kitchen, that Phillis must have left unfastened; and I saw part of her figure as she sate by the dresser, peeling apples with quick dexterity of finger, but with repeated turnings of her head towards some-book lying on the dresser by her. I softly rose, and as softly went into the kitchen, and looked over her shoulder; before she was aware of my neighbourhood, I had seen that the book was in a language unknown to me, and the running title was "L'Inferno." Just as I was making out the relationship of this word to "infernal," she started and turned round, and, as if continuing her thought as she spoke, she sighed out—

"Oh! it is so difficult! Can you help me?" putting her finger below a line.

"Me! I! Not I! I don't even know what language it is in!"

"Don't you see it is Dante?" she replied, almost petulantly; she did so want help.

"Italian, then?" said I dubiously; for I was not quite sure.

"Yes. And I do so want to make it out. Father can help me a little, for he knows Latin; but then he has so little time."

"You have not much, I should think, if you have often to try and do two things at once, as you are doing now."

"Oh! that's nothing! Father bought a heap of old books cheap. And I knew something about Dante before; and I have always liked Virgil so much. Paring apples is nothing, if I could only make out this old Italian. I wish you knew it."

"I wish I did," said I, moved by her impetuosity of tone.

"If, now, only Mr. Holdsworth were here; he can speak Italian like anything, I believe."

"Who is Mr. Holdsworth?" said Phillis, looking up.

"Oh, he's our head engineer. He's a regular first-rate fellow! He can do anything;" my hero-worship and my pride in my chief all coming into play. Besides, if I was not clever and

book-learned myself, it was something to belong to some one who was.

"How is it that he speaks Italian?" asked Phillis.

"He had to make a railway through Piedmont, which is in Italy, I believe; and he had to talk to all the workmen in Italian; and I have heard him say that for nearly two years he had only Italian books to read in the queer outlandish places he was in."

"Oh, dear!" said Phillis; "I wish"—and then she stopped. I was not quite sure whether to say the next thing that came into my mind; but I said it.

"Could I ask him anything about your book, or your difficulties?"

She was silent for a minute or so, and then she made reply—

"No! I think not. Thank you very much, though. I can generally puzzle a thing out in time. And then, perhaps, I remember it better than if some one had helped me. I'll put it away now, and you must move off, for I've got to make the paste for the pies; we always have a cold dinner on Sabbaths."

"But I may stay and help you, mayn't I?"

"Oh, yes; not that you can help at all, but I like to have you with me."

I was both flattered and annoyed at this straightforward avowal. I was pleased that she liked me; but I was young coxcomb enough to have wished to play the lover, and I was quite wise enough to perceive that if she had any idea of the kind in her head she would never have spoken out so frankly. I comforted myself immediately, however, by finding out that the grapes were sour. A great tall girl in a pinafore, half a head taller than I was, reading books that I had never heard of, and talking about them too, as of far more interest than any mere personal subjects; that was the last day on which I ever thought of my dear cousin Phillis as the possible mistress of my heart and life. But we were all the greater friends for this idea being utterly put away and buried out of sight.

Late in the evening the minister came home from Hornby. He had been calling on the different members of his flock; and unsatisfactory work it had proved to him, it seemed, from the fragments that dropped out of his thoughts into his talk.

"I don't see the men; they are all at their business, their shops, or their warehouses; they ought to be there. I have no fault to

find with them ; only if a pastor's teaching or words of admonition are good for anything, they are needed by the men as much as by the women."

"Cannot you go and see them in their places of business, and remind them of their Christian privileges and duties, minister?" asked cousin Holman, who evidently thought that her husband's words could never be out of place.

"No!" said he, shaking his head. "I judge them by myself. If there are clouds in the sky, and I am getting in the hay just ready for loading, and rain sure to come in the night, I should look ill upon Brother Robinson if he came into the field to speak about serious things."

"But, at any rate, father, you do good to the women, and perhaps they repeat what you have said to them to their husbands and children?"

"It is to be hoped they do, for I cannot reach the men directly ; but the women are apt to tarry before coming to me, to put on ribbons and gauds ; as if they could hear the message I bear to them best in their smart clothes. Mrs. Dobson to-day—Phillis, I am thankful thou dost not care for the vanities of dress!"

Phillis reddened a little as she said, in a low humble voice—

"But I do, father, I'm afraid. I often wish I could wear pretty-coloured ribbons round my throat like the squire's daughters."

"It's but natural, minister!" said his wife ; "I'm not above liking a silk gown better than a cotton one myself!"

"The love of dress is a temptation and a snare," said he gravely. "The true adornment is a meek and quiet spirit. And, wife," said he, as a sudden thought crossed his mind, "in that matter I, too, have sinned. I wanted to ask you, could we not sleep in the grey room, instead of our own?"

"Sleep in the grey room?—change our room at this time o' day!" cousin Holman asked, in dismay.

"Yes," said he. "It would save me from a daily temptation to anger. Look at my chin!" he continued ; "I cut it this morning—I cut it on Wednesday when I was shaving ; I do not know how many times I have cut it of late, and all from impatience at seeing Timothy Cooper at his work in the yard."

"He's a downright lazy tyke!" said cousin Holman. "He's not worth his wage. There's but little he can do, and what he can do, he does badly."

"True," said the minister. "But he is but, so to speak, a half-wit; and yet he has got a wife and children."

"More shame for him!"

"But that is past change. And if I turn him off, no one else will take him on. Yet I cannot help watching him of a morning as he goes sauntering about his work in the yard; and I watch, and I watch, till the old Adam rises strong within me at his lazy ways, and some day, I am afraid, I shall go down and send him about his business—let alone the way in which he makes me cut myself while I am shaving—and then his wife and children will starve. I wish we could move to the grey room."

I do not remember much more of my first visit to the Hope Farm. We went to chapel in Heathbridge, slowly and decorously walking along the lanes, ruddy and tawny with the colouring of the coming autumn. The minister walked a little before us, his hands behind his back, his head bent down, thinking about the discourse to be delivered to his people, cousin Holman said; and we spoke low and quietly, in order not to interrupt his thoughts. But I could not help noticing the respectful greetings which he received from both rich and poor as we went along; greetings which he acknowledged with a kindly wave of his hand, but with no words of reply. As we drew near the town, I could see some of the young fellows we met cast admiring looks on Phillis; and that made me look too. She had on a white gown, and a short black silk cloak, according to the fashion of the day. A straw bonnet, with brown ribbon strings; that was all. But what her dress wanted in colour, her sweet bonny face had. The walk made her cheeks bloom like the rose; the very whites of her eyes had a blue tinge in them, and her dark eyelashes brought out the depth of the blue eyes themselves. Her yellow hair was put away as straight as its natural curliness would allow. If she did not perceive the admiration she excited, I am sure cousin Holman did; for she looked as fierce and as proud as ever her quiet face could look, guarding her treasure, and yet glad to perceive that others could see that it was a treasure. That afternoon I had to return to Eltham to be ready for the next day's work. I found out afterwards that the minister and his family were all "exercised in spirit," as to whether they did well in asking me to repeat my visits at the Hope Farm, seeing that of necessity I must return to Eltham on the Sabbath-day. However, they did go on asking

me, and I went on visiting them, whenever my other engagements permitted me, Mr. Holdsworth being in this case, as in all, a kind and indulgent friend. Nor did my new acquaintances oust him from my strong regard and admiration. I had room in my heart for all, I am happy to say, and as far as I can remember, I kept praising each to the other in a manner which, if I had been an older man, living more amongst people of the world, I should have thought unwise, as well as a little ridiculous. It was unwise, certainly, as it was almost sure to cause disappointment if ever they did become acquainted; and perhaps it was ridiculous, though I do not think we any of us thought it so at the time. The minister used to listen to my accounts of Mr. Holdsworth's many accomplishments and various adventures in travel with the truest interest, and most kindly good faith; and Mr. Holdsworth in return liked to hear about my visits to the farm, and description of my cousins' life there—liked it, I mean, as much as he liked anything that was merely narrative, without leading to action.

So I went to the farm certainly, on an average, once a month during that autumn; the course of life there was so peaceful and quiet, that I can only remember one small event, and that was one that I think I took more notice of than any one else: Phillis left off wearing the pinafores that had always been so obnoxious to me: I do not know why they were banished, but on one of my visits I found them replaced by pretty linen aprons in the morning, and a black silk one in the afternoon. And the blue cotton gown became a brown stuff one as winter drew on; this sounds like some book I once read, in which a migration from the blue bed to the brown was spoken of as a great family event.

Towards Christmas my dear father came to see me, and to consult Mr. Holdsworth about the improvement which has since been known as "Manning's driving wheel." Mr. Holdsworth, as I think I have before said, had a very great regard for my father, who had been employed in the same great machine-shop in which Mr. Holdsworth had served his apprenticeship; and he and my father had many mutual jokes about one of these gentlemen-apprentices who used to set about his smith's work in white wash-leather gloves, for fear of spoiling his hands. Mr. Holdsworth often spoke to me about my father as having the same kind of genius for mechanical invention as that of George Stephenson, and my father had come over now to consult him about several

improvements, as well as an offer of partnership. It was a great pleasure to me to see the mutual regard of these two men. Mr. Holdsworth, young, handsome, keen, well-dressed, an object of admiration to all the youth of Eltham; my father, in his decent but unfashionable Sunday clothes, his plain, sensible face full of hard lines, the marks of toil and thought,—his hands, blackened beyond the power of soap and water by years of labour in the foundry; speaking a strong Northern dialect, while Mr. Holdsworth had a long soft drawl in his voice, as many of the Southerners have, and was reckoned in Eltham to give himself airs.

Although most of my father's leisure time was occupied with conversations about the business I have mentioned, he felt that he ought not to leave Eltham without going to pay his respects to the relations who had been so kind to his son. So he and I ran up on an engine along the incomplete line as far as Heathbridge, and went, by invitation, to spend a day at the farm.

It was odd and yet pleasant to me to perceive how these two men, each having led up to this point such totally dissimilar lives, seemed to come together by instinct, after one quiet straight look into each other's faces. My father was a thin, wiry man of five foot seven; the minister was a broad-shouldered, fresh-coloured man of six foot one; they were neither of them great talkers in general—perhaps the minister the most so—but they spoke much to each other. My father went into the fields with the minister; I think I see him now, with his hands behind his back, listening intently to all explanations of tillage, and the different processes of farming; occasionally taking up an implement, as if unconsciously, and examining it with a critical eye, and now and then asking a question, which I could see was considered as pertinent by his companion. Then we returned to look at the cattle, housed and bedded in expectation of the snowstorm hanging black on the western horizon, and my father learned the points of a cow with as much attention as if he meant to turn farmer. He had his little book that he used for mechanical memoranda and measurements in his pocket, and he took it out to write down "straight back," "small muzzle," "deep barrel," and I know not what else, under the head "cow." He was very critical on a turnip-cutting machine, the clumsiness of which first incited him to talk; and when we went into the house he sat thinking and quiet for a bit, while Phillis and her mother made

the last preparations for tea, with a little unheeded apology from cousin Holman, because we were not sitting in the best parlour, which she thought might be chilly on so cold a night. I wanted nothing better than the blazing, crackling fire that sent a glow over all the house-place, and warmed the snowy flags under our feet till they seemed to have more heat than the crimson rug right in front of the fire. After tea, as Phillis and I were talking together very happily, I heard an irrepressible exclamation from cousin Holman—

“Whatever is the man about!”

And on looking round, I saw my father taking a straight burning stick out of the fire, and, after waiting for a minute, and examining the charred end to see if it was fitted for his purpose, he went to the hard-wood dresser, scoured to the last pitch of whiteness and cleanliness, and began drawing with the stick; the best substitute for chalk or charcoal within his reach, for his pocket-book pencil was not strong or bold enough for his purpose. When he had done, he began to explain his new model of a turnip-cutting machine to the minister, who had been watching him in silence all the time. Cousin Holman had, in the meantime, taken a duster out of a drawer, and, under pretence of being as much interested as her husband in the drawing, was secretly trying on an outside mark how easily it would come off, and whether it would leave her dresser as white as before. Then Phillis was sent for the book on dynamics, about which I had been consulted during my first visit, and my father had to explain many difficulties, which he did in language as clear as his mind, making drawings with his stick wherever they were needed as illustrations, the minister sitting with his massive head resting on his hands, his elbows on the table, almost unconscious of Phillis, leaning over and listening greedily; with her hand on his shoulder, sucking in information like her father's own daughter. I was rather sorry for cousin Holman; I had been so once or twice before; for do what she would, she was completely unable even to understand the pleasure her husband and daughter took in intellectual pursuits, much less to care in the least herself for the pursuits themselves, and was thus unavoidably thrown out of some of their interests. I had once or twice thought she was a little jealous of her own child, as a fitter companion for her husband than she was herself; and I fancied the minister himself was aware of this feeling, for I had noticed

an occasional sudden change of subject, and a tenderness of appeal in his voice as he spoke to her, which always made her look contented and peaceful again. I do not think that Phillis ever perceived these little shadows; in the first place, she had such complete reverence for her parents that she listened to them both as if they had been St. Peter and St. Paul; and besides, she was always too much engrossed with any matter in hand to think about other people's manners and looks.

This night I could see, though she did not, how much she was winning on my father. She asked a few questions which showed that she had followed his explanations up to that point; possibly, too, her unusual beauty might have something to do with his favourable impression of her; but he made no scruple of expressing his admiration of her to her father and mother in her absence from the room; and from that evening I date a project of his which came out to me a day or two afterwards, as we sate in my little three-cornered room in Eltham.

"Paul," he began, "I never thought to be a rich man; but I think it's coming upon me. Some folk are making a deal of my new machine" (calling it by its technical name), "and Ellison, of the Borough Green Works, has gone so far as to ask me to be his partner."

"Mr Ellison the justice!—who lives in King Street? why, he drives his carriage!" said I, doubting, yet exultant.

"Ay, lad, John Ellison. But that's no sign that I shall drive my carriage. Though I should like to save thy mother walking, for she's not so young as she was. But that's a long way off, anyhow. I reckon I should start with a third profit. It might be seven hundred, or it might be more. I should like to have the power to work out some fancies o' mine. I care for that much more than for th' brass. And Ellison has no lads; and by nature the business would come to thee in course o' time. Ellison's lassies are but bits o' things, and are not like to come by husbands just yet; and when they do, maybe they'll not be in the mechanical line. It will be an opening for thee, lad, if thou art steady. Thou'rt not great shakes, I know, in th' inventing line; but many a one gets on better without having fancies for something he does not see and never has seen. I'm right down glad to see that mother's cousins are such uncommon folk for sense and goodness. I have taken the minister to my heart like a brother, and she is a womanly quiet sort of a body. And I'll tell you

frank, Paul, it will be a happy day for me if ever you can come and tell me that Phillis Holman is like to be my daughter. I think if that lass had not a penny, she would be the making of a man; and she'll have yon house and lands, and you may be her match yet in fortune if all goes well."

I was growing as red as fire; I did not know what to say, and yet I wanted to say something; but the idea of having a wife of my own at some future day, though it had often floated about in my own head, sounded so strange when it was thus first spoken about by my father. He saw my confusion, and half smiling said—

"Well, lad, what dost say to the old father's plans? Thou art but young, to be sure; but when I was thy age, I would ha' given my right hand if I might ha' thought of the chance of wedding the lass I cared for"—

"My mother?" asked I, a little struck by the change of his tone of voice.

"No! not thy mother. Thy mother is a very good woman—none better. No! the lass I cared for at nineteen ne'er knew how I loved her, and a year or two after and she was dead, and ne'er knew. I think she would ha' been glad to ha' known it, poor Molly; but I had to leave the place where we lived for to try to earn my bread—and I meant to come back—but before ever I did, she was dead and gone: I ha' never gone there since. But if you fancy Phillis Holman, and can get her to fancy you, my lad, it shall go different with you, Paul, to what it did with your father."

I took counsel with myself very rapidly, and I came to a clear conclusion.

"Father," said I, "if I fancied Phillis ever so much, she would never fancy me. I like her as much as I could like a sister; and she likes me as if I were her brother—her younger brother."

I could see my father's countenance fall a little.

"You see she's so clever—she's more like a man than a woman—she knows Latin and Greek."

"She'd forget 'em, if she'd a houseful of children," was my father's comment on this.

"But she knows many a thing besides, and is wise as well as learned: she has been so much with her father. She would never think much of me, and I should like my wife to think a deal of her husband."

"It is not just book-learning or the want of it as makes a wife think much or little of her husband," replied my father, evidently unwilling to give up a project which had taken deep root in his mind. "It's a something—I don't rightly know how to call it—if he's manly, and sensible, and straightforward; and I reckon you're that, my boy."

"I don't think I should like to have a wife taller than I am, father," said I, smiling; he smiled too, but not heartily.

"Well," said he, after a pause. "It's but a few days I've been thinking of it, but I'd got as fond of my notion as if it had been a new engine as I'd been planning out. Here's our Paul, thinks I to myself, a good sensible breed o' lad, as has never vexed or troubled his mother or me; with a good business opening out before him, age nineteen, not so bad-looking, though perhaps not to call handsome, and here's his cousin, not too near a cousin, but just nice, as one may say; aged seventeen, good and true, and well brought up to work with her hands as well as her head; a scholar—but that can't be helped, and is more her misfortune than her fault, seeing she is the only child of a scholar—and as I said afore, once she's a wife and a mother she'll forget it all, I'll be bound—with a good fortune in land and house when it shall please the Lord to take her parents to himself; with eyes like poor Molly's for beauty, a colour that comes and goes on a milk-white skin, and as pretty a mouth"—

"Why, Mr. Manning, what fair lady are you describing?" asked Mr. Holdsworth, who had come quickly and suddenly upon our *tête-à-tête*, and had caught my father's last words as he entered the room.

Both my father and I felt rather abashed; it was such an odd subject for us to be talking about; but my father, like a straightforward, simple man as he was, spoke out the truth.

"I've been telling Paul of Ellison's offer, and saying how good an opening it made for him"—

"I wish I'd as good," said Mr. Holdsworth. "But has the business a 'pretty mouth'?"

"You're always so full of your joking, Mr. Holdsworth," said my father. "I was going to say that if he and his cousin Phillis Holman liked to make it up between them, I would put no spoke in the wheel."

"Phillis Holman!" said Mr. Holdsworth. "Is she the daughter of the minister-farmer out at Heathbridge. Have I

been helping on the course of true love by letting you go there so often? I knew nothing of it."

"There is nothing to know," said I, more annoyed than I chose to show. "There is no more true love in the case than may be between the first brother and sister you may choose to meet. I have been telling father she would never think of me; she's a great deal taller and cleverer; and I'd rather be taller and more learned than my wife when I have one."

"And it is she, then, that has the pretty mouth your father spoke about? I should think that would be an antidote to the cleverness and learning. But I ought to apologise for breaking in upon your last night; I came upon business to your father."

And then he and my father began to talk about many things that had no interest for me just then, and I began to go over again my conversation with my father. The more I thought about it, the more I felt that I had spoken truly about my feelings towards Phillis Holman. I loved her dearly as a sister, but I could never fancy her as my wife. Still less could I think of her ever—yes, *condescending*, that is the word—condescending to marry me. I was roused from a reverie on what I should like my possible wife to be, by hearing my father's warm praise of the minister, as a most unusual character; how they had got back from the diameter of driving-wheels to the subject of the Holmans I could never tell; but I saw that my father's weighty praises were exciting some curiosity in Mr. Holdsworth's mind; indeed, he said, almost in a voice of reproach—

"Why, Paul, you never told me what kind of a fellow this minister-cousin of yours was?"

"I don't know that I found out, sir," said I. "But if I had, I don't think you'd have listened to me, as you have done to my father."

"No! most likely not, old fellow," replied Mr. Holdsworth, laughing. And again and afresh I saw what a handsome pleasant clear face his was; and though this evening I had been a bit put out with him—through his sudden coming, and his having heard my father's open-hearted confidence—my hero resumed all his empire over me by his bright merry laugh.

And if he had not resumed his old place that night, he would have done so the next day, when, after my father's departure, Mr. Holdsworth spoke about him with such just respect for his

character, such ungrudging admiration of his great mechanical genius, that I was compelled to say, almost unawares—

“Thank you, sir. I am very much obliged to you.”

“Oh, you’re not at all. I am only speaking the truth. Here’s a Birmingham workman, self-educated, one may say—having never associated with stimulating minds, or had what advantages travel and contact with the world may be supposed to afford—working out his own thoughts into steel and iron, making a scientific name for himself—a fortune, if it pleases him to work for money—and keeping his singleness of heart, his perfect simplicity of manner; it puts me out of patience to think of my expensive schooling, my travels hither and thither, my heaps of scientific books, and I have done nothing to speak of. But it’s evidently good blood; there’s that Mr. Holman, that cousin of yours, made of the same stuff.”

“But he’s only cousin because he married my mother’s second cousin,” said I.

“That knocks a pretty theory on the head, and twice over, too. I should like to make Holman’s acquaintance.”

“I am sure they would be so glad to see you at Hope Farm,” said I eagerly. “In fact, they’ve asked me to bring you several times: only I thought you would find it dull.”

“Not at all. I can’t go yet though, even if you do get me an invitation; for the ——— Company want me to go to the ——— Valley, and look over the ground a bit for them, to see if it would do for a branch line; it’s a job which may take me away for some time; but I shall be backwards and forwards, and you’re quite up to doing what is needed in my absence; the only work that may be beyond you is keeping old Jevons from drinking.”

He went on giving me directions about the management of the men employed on the line, and no more was said then, or for several months, about his going to Hope Farm. He went off into ——— Valley, a dark overshadowed dale, where the sun seemed to set behind the hills before four o’clock on midsummer afternoon.

Perhaps it was this that brought on the attack of low fever which he had soon after the beginning of the new year; he was very ill for many weeks, almost many months; a married sister—his only relation, I think—came down from London to nurse him, and I went over to him when I could, to see him, and give him “masculine news,” as he called it; reports of the progress of the line, which, I am glad to say, I was able to carry on in

his absence, in the slow gradual way which suited the company best, while trade was in a languid state, and money dear in the market. Of course, with this occupation for my scanty leisure, I did not often go over to Hope Farm. Whenever I did go, I met with a thorough welcome ; and many inquiries were made as to Holdsworth's illness, and the progress of his recovery.

At length, in June I think it was, he was sufficiently recovered to come back to his lodgings at Eltham, and resume part at least of his work. His sister, Mrs. Robinson, had been obliged to leave him some weeks before, owing to some epidemic amongst her own children. As long as I had seen Mr. Holdsworth in the rooms at the little inn at Hensleydale, where I had been accustomed to look upon him as an invalid, I had not been aware of the visible shake his fever had given to his health. But, once back in the old lodgings, where I had always seen him so buoyant, eloquent, decided, and vigorous in former days, my spirits sank at the change in one whom I had always regarded with a strong feeling of admiring affection. He sank into silence and despondency after the least exertion ; he seemed as if he could not make up his mind to any action, or else that, when it was made up, he lacked strength to carry out his purpose. Of course, it was but the natural state of slow convalescence, after so sharp an illness ; but, at the time, I did not know this, and perhaps I represented his state as more serious than it was to my kind relations at Hope Farm ; who, in their grave, simple, eager way, immediately thought of the only help they could give.

"Bring him out here," said the minister. "Our air here is good to a proverb ; the June days are fine ; he may loiter away his time in the hay-field, and the sweet smells will be a balm in themselves—better than physic."

"And," said cousin Holman, scarcely waiting for her husband to finish his sentence, "tell him there is new milk and fresh eggs to be had for the asking ; it's lucky Daisy has just calved, for her milk is always as good as other cows' cream ; and there is the plaid room with the morning sun all streaming in."

Phillis said nothing, but looked as much interested in the project as any one. I took it up myself. I wanted them to see him ; him to know them. I proposed it to him when I got home. He was too languid, after the day's fatigue, to be willing to make the little exertion of going amongst strangers ; and disappointed me by almost declining to accept the invitation I brought. The next

morning it was different ; he apologised for his ungraciousness of the night before ; and told me that he would get all things in train, so as to be ready to go out with me to Hope Farm on the following Saturday.

"For you must go with me, Manning," said he ; "I used to be as impudent a fellow as need be, and rather liked going amongst strangers and making my way ; but since my illness I am almost like a girl, and turn hot and cold with shyness, as they do, I fancy."

So it was fixed. We were to go out to Hope Farm on Saturday afternoon ; and it was also understood that if the air and the life suited Mr. Holdsworth, he was to remain there for a week or ten days, doing what work he could at that end of the line, while I took his place at Eltham to the best of my ability. I grew a little nervous, as the time drew near, and wondered how the brilliant Holdsworth would agree with the quiet quaint family of the minister ; how they would like him and many of his half-foreign ways. I tried to prepare him, by telling him from time to time little things about the goings-on at Hope Farm.

"Manning," said he, "I see you don't think I am half good enough for your friends. Out with it, man."

"No," I replied boldly. "I think you are good ; but I don't know if you are quite of their kind of goodness."

"And you've found out already that there is greater chance of disagreement between two 'kinds of goodness,' each having its own idea of right, than between a given goodness and a moderate degree of naughtiness—which last often arises from an indifference to right?"

"I don't know. I think you're talking metaphysics, and I am sure that is bad for you."

"'When a man talks to you in a way that you don't understand about a thing which he does not understand, them's metaphysics.' You remember the clown's definition, don't you, Manning?"

"No, I don't," said I. "But what I do understand is, that you must go to bed ; and tell me at what time we must start to-morrow, that I may go to Hepworth, and get those letters written we were talking about this morning."

"Wait till to-morrow, and let us see what the day is like," he answered, with such languid indecision as showed me he was over-fatigued. So I went my way.

The morrow was blue and sunny, and beautiful; the very perfection of an early summer's day. Mr. Holdsworth was all impatience to be off into the country; morning had brought back his freshness and strength, and consequent eagerness to be doing. I was afraid we were going to my cousin's farm rather too early, before they would expect us; but what could I do with such a restless vehement man as Holdsworth was that morning? We came down upon the Hope Farm before the dew was off the grass on the shady side of the lane; the great house-dog was loose, basking in the sun, near the closed side door. I was surprised at this door being shut, for all summer long it was open from morning to night; but it was only on latch. I opened it, Rover watching me with half-suspicious, half-trustful eyes. The room was empty.

"I don't know where they can be," said I. "But come in and sit down while I go and look for them. You must be tired."

"Not I. This sweet balny air is like a thousand tonics. Besides, this room is hot, and smells of those pungent wood-ashes. What are we to do?"

"Go round to the kitchen. Betty will tell us where they are."

So we went round into the farmyard, Rover accompanying us out of a grave sense of duty. Betty was washing out her milk-pans in the cold bubbling spring-water that constantly trickled in and out of a stone trough. In such weather as this most of her kitchen-work was done out of doors.

"Eh, dear!" said she, "the minister and missus is away at Hornby! They ne'er thought of your coming so betimes! The missus had some errands to do, and she thought as she'd walk with the minister and be back by dinner-time."

"Did not they expect us to dinner?" said I.

"Well, they did, and they did not, as I may say. Missus said to me the cold lamb would do well enough if you did not come; and if you did I was to put on a chicken and some bacon to boil; and I'll go do it now, for it is hard to boil bacon enough."

"And is Phillis gone, too?" Mr. Holdsworth was making friends with Rover.

"No! She's just somewhere about. I reckon you'll find her in the kitchen-garden, getting peas."

had undertaken to discuss her future plans with her, and he was obliged to go on.

"Now, my dear child—I have known you since you were quite a little girl, you know—we must try not to give way to feeling"—he himself was choking; she was quite quiet—"but think what is to be done. You will have the rent of this house, and we have a very good offer for it—a tenant on lease of seven years at a hundred and twenty pounds a year"—

"I will never let this house," said she, standing up suddenly, and as if defying him.

"Not let Ford Bank! Why? I don't understand it—I can't have been clear—Ellinor, the rent of this house is all you will have to live on!"

"I can't help it, I can't leave this house. Oh, Mr. Ness, I can't leave this house."

"My dear child, you shall not be hurried—I know how hardly all these things are coming upon you (and I wish I had never seen Corbet, with all my heart I do!)"—this was almost to himself, but she must have heard it, for she quivered all over—"but leave this house you must. You must eat, and the rent of this house must pay for your food; you must dress, and there is nothing but the rent to clothe you. I will gladly have you to stay at the Parsonage as long as ever you like; but, in fact, the negotiations with Mr. Osbaldistone, the gentleman who offers to take the house, are nearly completed"—

"It is my house!" said Ellinor fiercely. "I know it is settled on me."

"No, my dear. It is held in trust for you by Sir Frank Holster and Mr. Johnson; you to receive all moneys and benefits accruing from it"—he spoke gently, for he almost thought her head was turned—"but you remember you are not of age, and Mr. Johnson and I have full power."

Ellinor sat down, helpless.

"Leave me," she said at length. "You are very kind, but you don't know all. I cannot stand any more talking now," she added faintly.

Mr. Ness bent over her and kissed her forehead, and withdrew without another word. He went to Miss Monro.

"Well! and how did you find her?" was her first inquiry, after the usual greetings had passed between them. "It is really quite sad to see how she gives way; I speak to her, and speak to

her, and tell her how she is neglecting all her duties, and it does no good."

"She has had to bear a still further sorrow to-day," said Mr. Ness. "On the part of Mr. Johnson and myself I have a very painful duty to perform to you as well as to her. Mr. Wilkins has died insolvent. I grieve to say there is no hope of your ever receiving any of your annuity!"

Miss Monro looked very blank. Many happy little visions faded away in those few moments; then she roused up and said, "I am but forty; I have a good fifteen years of work in me left yet, thank God. Insolvent! Do you mean he has left no money?"

"Not a farthing. The creditors may be thankful if they are fully paid."

"And Ellinor?"

"Ellinor will have the rent of this house, which is hers by right of her mother's settlement, to live on."

"How much will that be?"

"One hundred and twenty pounds."

Miss Monro's lips went into a form prepared for whistling. Mr. Ness continued—

"She is at present unwilling enough to leave this house, poor girl. It is but natural; but she has no power in the matter, even were there any other course open to her. I can only say how glad, how honoured, I shall feel by as long a visit as you and she can be prevailed upon to pay me at the Parsonage."

"Where is Mr. Corbet?" said Miss Monro.

"I do not know. After breaking off his engagement he wrote me a long letter, explanatory, as he called it; exculpatory, as I termed it. I wrote back, curtly enough, saying that I regretted the breaking-off of an intercourse which had always been very pleasant to me, but that he must be aware that, with my intimacy with the family at Ford Bank, it would be both awkward and unpleasant to all parties if he and I remained on our previous footing. Who is that going past the window? Ellinor riding?"

Miss Monro went to the window. "Yes! I am thankful to see her on horseback again. It was only this morning I advised her to have a ride!"

"Poor Dixon! he will suffer too; his legacy can no more be paid than the others; and it is not many young ladies who will be as content to have so old-fashioned a groom riding after them as Ellinor seems to be."

into which she was shelling them. Rover lay at her feet, snapping now and then at the flies. I went to her, and tried to help her; but somehow the sweet crisp young peas found their way more frequently into my mouth than into the basket, while we talked together in a low tone, fearful of being overheard through the open casements of the house-place in which Holdsworth was resting.

"Don't you think him handsome?" asked I.

"Perhaps—yes—I have hardly looked at him," she replied.

"But is not he very like a foreigner?"

"Yes, he cuts his hair foreign fashion," said I.

"I like an Englishman to look like an Englishman."

"I don't think he thinks about it. He says he began that way when he was in Italy, because everybody wore it so, and it is natural to keep it on in England."

"Not if he began it in Italy because everybody there wore it so. Everybody here wears it differently."

I was a little offended with Phillis's logical fault-finding with my friend; and I determined to change the subject.

"When is your mother coming home?"

"I should think she might come any time now; but she had to go and see Mrs. Morton, who was ill, and she might be kept, and not be home till dinner. Don't you think you ought to go and see how Mr. Holdsworth is going on, Paul? He may be faint again."

I went at her bidding; but there was no need for it. Mr. Holdsworth was up, standing by the window, his hands in his pockets; he had evidently been watching us. He turned away as I entered.

"So that is the girl I found your good father planning for your wife, Paul, that evening when I interrupted you! Are you of the same coy mind still? It did not look like it a minute ago."

"Phillis and I understand each other," I replied sturdily. "We are like brother and sister. She would not have me as a husband if there was not another man in the world; and it would take a deal to make me think of her—as my father wishes" (somehow I did not like to say "as a wife"), "but we love each other dearly."

"Well, I am rather surprised at it—not at your loving each other in a brother-and-sister kind of way—but at your finding it so impossible to fall in love with such a beautiful woman."

Woman! beautiful woman! I had thought of Phillis as a comely but awkward girl; and I could not banish the pinafore from my mind's eye when I tried to picture her to myself. Now I turned, as Mr. Holdsworth had done, to look at her again out of the window: she had just finished her task, and was standing up, her back to us, holding the basket, and the basin in it, high in air, out of Rover's reach, who was giving vent to his delight at the probability of a change of place by glad leaps and barks, and snatches at what he imagined to be a withheld prize. At length she grew tired of their mutual play, and with a feint of striking him, and a "Down, Rover! do hush!" she looked towards the window where we were standing, as if to reassure herself that no one had been disturbed by the noise, and seeing us, she coloured all over, and hurried away, with Rover still curving in sinuous lines about her as she walked.

"I should like to have sketched her," said Mr. Holdsworth, as he turned away. He went back to his chair, and rested in silence for a minute or two. Then he was up again.

"I would give a good deal for a book," said he. "It would keep me quiet." He began to look round; there were a few volumes at one end of the shovel-board.

"Fifth volume of Matthew Henry's Commentary," said he, reading their titles aloud. "Housewife's Complete Manual; Berridge on Prayer; L'Inferno—Dante!" in great surprise. "Why, who reads this?"

"I told you Phillis read it. Don't you remember? She knows Latin and Greek, too."

"To be sure! I remember! But somehow I never put two and two together. That quiet girl, full of household work, is the wonderful scholar, then, that put you to rout with her questions when you first began to come here. To be sure, 'Cousin Phillis!' What's here; a paper with the hard obsolete words written out. I wonder what sort of a dictionary she has got. Baretti won't tell her all these words. Stay! I have got a pencil here. I'll write down the most accepted meanings, and save her a little trouble."

So he took her book and the paper back to the little round table, and employed himself in writing explanations and definitions of the words which had troubled her. I was not sure if he was not taking a liberty; it did not quite please me, and yet I did not know why. He had only just done, and replaced the paper in the book, and put the latter back in its place, when I

heard the sound of wheels stopping in the lane, and looking out, I saw cousin Holman getting out of a neighbour's gig, making her little curtsey of acknowledgment, and then coming towards the house. I went out to meet her.

"Oh, Paul!" said she, "I am so sorry I was kept; and then Thomas Dobson said if I would wait a quarter of an hour he would—— But where's your friend Mr. Holdsworth? I hope he is come?"

Just then he came out, and with his pleasant cordial manner took her hand, and thanked her for asking him to come out here to get strong.

"I'm sure I am very glad to see you, sir. It was the minister's thought. I took it into my head you would be dull in our quiet house, for Paul says you've been such a great traveller; but the minister said that dulness would perhaps suit you while you were but ailing, and that I was to ask Paul to be here as much as he could. I hope you'll find yourself happy with us, I'm sure, sir. Has Phillis given you something to eat and drink, I wonder? there's a deal in eating a little often, if one has to get strong after an illness." And then she began to question him as to the details of his indisposition in her simple motherly way. He seemed at once to understand her, and to enter into friendly relations with her. It was not quite the same in the evening, when the minister came home. Men have always a little natural antipathy to get over when they first meet as strangers. But in this case each was disposed to make an effort to like the other; only each was to each a specimen of an unknown class. I had to leave the Hope Farm on Sunday afternoon, as I had Mr. Holdsworth's work as well as my own to look to in Eltham; and I was not at all sure how things would go on during the week that Holdsworth was to remain on his visit; I had been once or twice in hot water already at the near clash of opinions between the minister and my much-vaunted friend. On the Wednesday I received a short note from Holdsworth; he was going to stay on, and return with me on the following Sunday, and he wanted me to send him a certain list of books, his theodolite, and other surveying instruments, all of which could easily be conveyed down the line to Heathbridge. I went to his lodgings and picked out the books. Italian, Latin, trigonometry; a pretty considerable parcel they made, besides the implements. I began to be curious as to the general progress of affairs at Hope Farm,

but I could not go over till the Saturday. At Heathbridge I found Holdsworth, come to meet me. He was looking quite a different man to what I had left him; embrowned, sparkles in his eyes, so languid before. I told him how much stronger he looked.

"Yes!" said he. "I am fidgeting fain to be at work again. Last week I dreaded the thoughts of my employment; now I am full of desire to begin. This week in the country has done wonders for me."

"You have enjoyed yourself, then?"

"Oh! it has been perfect in its way. Such a thorough country life! and yet removed from the dulness which I always used to fancy accompanied country life, by the extraordinary intelligence of the minister. I have fallen into calling him 'the minister,' like every one else."

"You get on with him, then?" said I. "I was a little afraid."

"I was on the verge of displeasing him once or twice, I fear, with random assertions and exaggerated expressions, such as one always uses with other people, and thinks nothing of; but I tried to check myself when I saw how it shocked the good man; and really it is very wholesome exercise, this trying to make one's words represent one's thoughts, instead of merely looking to their effect on others."

"Then you are quite friends now?" I asked.

"Yes, thoroughly; at any rate as far as I go. I never met a man with such a desire for knowledge. In information, as far as it can be gained from books, he far exceeds me on most subjects; but then I have travelled and seen—— Were not you surprised at the list of things I sent for?"

"Yes; I thought it did not promise much rest."

"Oh, some of the books were for the minister, and some for his daughter. (I call her Phillis to myself, but I use euphuisms in speaking about her to others. I don't like to seem familiar, and yet Miss Holman is a term I have never heard used.)"

"I thought the Italian books were for her."

"Yes! Fancy her trying at Dante for her first book in Italian! I had a capital novel by Manzoni, '*I Promessi Sposi*,' just the thing for a beginner! and if she must still puzzle out Dante, my dictionary is far better than hers."

"Then she found out you had written those definitions on her list of words?"

"Oh! yes"—with a smile of amusement and pleasure. He was going to tell me what had taken place, but checked himself.

"But I don't think the minister will like your having given her a novel to read?"

"Pooh! What can be more harmless? Why make a bug-bear of a word! It is as pretty and innocent a tale as can be met with. You don't suppose they take Virgil for gospel?"

By this time we were at the farm. I think Phillis gave me a warmer welcome than usual, and cousin Holman was kindness itself. Yet somehow I felt as if I had lost my place, and that Holdsworth had taken it. He knew all the ways of the house; he was full of little filial attentions to cousin Holman; he treated Phillis with the affectionate condescension of an elder brother; not a bit more; not in any way different. He questioned me about the progress of affairs in Eltham with eager interest.

"Ah!" said cousin Holman, "you'll be spending a different kind of time next week to what you have done this! I can see how busy you'll make yourself! But if you don't take care you'll be ill again, and have to come back to our quiet ways of going on."

"Do you suppose I shall need to be ill to wish to come back here?" he answered warmly. "I am only afraid you have treated me so kindly that I shall always be turning up on your hands."

"That's right," she replied. "Only don't go and make yourself ill by over-work. I hope you'll go on with a cup of new milk every morning, for I am sure that is the best medicine; and put a teaspoonful of rum in it if you like; many a one speaks highly of that, only we had no rum in the house."

I brought with me an atmosphere of active life which I think he had begun to miss; and it was natural that he should seek my company, after his week of retirement. Once I saw Phillis looking at us as we talked together with a kind of wistful curiosity; but as soon as she caught my eye, she turned away, blushing deeply.

That evening I had a little talk with the minister. I strolled along the Hornby road to meet him; for Holdsworth was giving Phillis an Italian lesson, and cousin Holman had fallen asleep over her work.

Somehow, and not unwillingly on my part, our talk fell on the friend whom I had introduced to the Hope Farm.

"Yes! I like him!" said the minister, weighing his words a little as he spoke. "I like him. I hope I am justified in doing it, but he takes hold of me, as it were; and I have almost been afraid lest he carries me away, in spite of my judgment."

"He is a good fellow; indeed he is," said I. "My father thinks well of him; and I have seen a deal of him. I would not have had him come here if I did not know that you would approve of him."

"Yes" (once more hesitating), "I like him, and I think he is an upright man; there is a want of seriousness in his talk at times, but, at the same time, it is wonderful to listen to him! He makes Horace and Virgil living, instead of dead, by the stories he tells me of his sojourn in the very countries where they lived, and where to this day, he says—— But it is like dram-drinking. I listen to him till I forget my duties, and am carried off my feet. Last Sabbath evening he led us away into talk on profane subjects ill befitting the day."

By this time we were at the house, and our conversation stopped. But before the day was out, I saw the unconscious hold that my friend had got over all the family. And no wonder: he had seen so much and done so much as compared to them, and he told about it all so easily and naturally, and yet as I never heard any one else do; and his ready pencil was out in an instant to draw on scraps of paper all sorts of illustrations—modes of drawing up water in Northern Italy, wine-carts, buffaloes, stone-pines, I know not what. After we had all looked at these drawings, Phillis gathered them together, and took them.

It is many years since I have seen thee, Edward Holdsworth, but thou wast a delightful fellow! Ay, and a good one too; though much sorrow was caused by thee!

PART III.

JUST after this I went home for a week's holiday. Everything was prospering there; my father's new partnership gave evident satisfaction to both parties. There was no display of increased wealth in our modest household; but my mother had a few extra comforts provided for her by her husband. I made

acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Ellison, and first saw pretty Margaret Ellison, who is now my wife. When I returned to Eltham, I found that a step was decided upon which had been in contemplation for some time; that Holdsworth and I should remove our quarters to Hornby; our daily presence, and as much of our time as possible, being required for the completion of the line at that end.

Of course this led to greater facility of intercourse with the Hope Farm people. We could easily walk out there after our day's work was done, and spend a balmy evening hour or two, and yet return before the summer's twilight had quite faded away. Many a time, indeed, we would fain have stayed longer—the open air, the fresh and pleasant country, made so agreeable a contrast to the close, hot town lodgings which I shared with Mr. Holdsworth; but early hours, both at eve and morn, were an imperative necessity with the minister, and he made no scruple at turning either or both of us out of the house directly after evening prayer, or “exercise,” as he called it. The remembrance of many a happy day, and of several little scenes, comes back upon me as I think of that summer. They rise like pictures to my memory, and in this way I can date their succession; for I know that corn-harvest must have come after hay-making, apple-gathering after corn-harvest.

The removal to Hornby took up some time, during which we had neither of us any leisure to go out to the Hope Farm. Mr. Holdsworth had been out there once during my absence at home. One sultry evening, when work was done, he proposed our walking out and paying the Holmans a visit. It so happened that I had omitted to write my usual weekly letter home in our press of business, and I wished to finish that before going out. Then he said that he would go, and that I could follow him if I liked. This I did in about an hour; the weather was so oppressive, I remember, that I took off my coat as I walked, and hung it over my arm. All the doors and windows at the farm were open when I arrived there, and every tiny leaf on the trees was still. The silence of the place was profound; at first I thought that it was entirely deserted; but just as I drew near the door I heard a weak sweet voice begin to sing; it was cousin Holman, all by herself in the house-place, piping up a hymn, as she knitted away in the clouded light. She gave me a kindly welcome, and poured out all the small domestic

news of the fortnight past upon me, and, in return, I told her about my own people and my visit at home.

"Where were the rest?" at length I asked.

Betty and the men were in the field helping with the last load of hay, for the minister said there would be rain before the morning. Yes, and the minister himself, and Phillis, and Mr. Holdsworth, were all there helping. She thought that she herself could have done something; but perhaps she was the least fit for haymaking of any one; and somebody must stay at home and take care of the house, there were so many tramps about; if I had not had something to do with the railroad she would have called them navvies. I asked her if she minded being left alone, as I should like to go and help; and having her full and glad permission to leave her alone, I went off, following her directions: through the farmyard, past the cattle-pond, into the ash-field, beyond into the higher field with two holly-bushes in the middle. I arrived there: there was Betty with all the farming men, and a cleared field, and a heavily laden cart; one man at the top of the great pile ready to catch the fragrant hay which the others threw up to him with their pitchforks; a little heap of cast-off clothes in a corner of the field (for the heat, even at seven o'clock, was insufferable), a few cans and baskets, and Rover lying by them panting, and keeping watch. Plenty of loud, hearty, cheerful talking; but no minister, no Phillis, no Mr. Holdsworth. Betty saw me first, and understanding who it was that I was in search of, she came towards me.

"They're out yonder—agait wi' them things o' Measter Holdsworth's."

So "out yonder" I went; out on to a broad upland common, full of red sand-banks, and sweeps and hollows; bordered by dark firs, purple in the coming shadows, but near at hand all ablaze with flowering gorse, or, as we call it in the south, furze-bushes, which, seen against the belt of distant trees, appeared brilliantly golden. On this heath, a little way from the field-gate, I saw the three. I counted their heads, joined together in an eager group over Holdsworth's theodolite. He was teaching the minister the practical art of surveying and taking a level. I was wanted to assist, and was quickly set to work to hold the chain. Phillis was as intent as her father; she had hardly time to greet me, so desirous was she to hear some answer to her father's question.

So we went on, the dark clouds still gathering, for perhaps five minutes after my arrival. Then came the blinding lightning and the rumble and quick-following rattling peal of thunder right over our heads. It came sooner than I expected, sooner than they had looked for: the rain delayed not; it came pouring down; and what were we to do for shelter? Phillis had nothing on but her indoor things—no bonnet, no shawl. Quick as the darting lightning around us, Holdsworth took off his coat and wrapped it round her neck and shoulders, and, almost without a word, hurried us all into such poor shelter as one of the overhanging sand-banks could give. There we were, cowered down, close together, Phillis innermost, almost too tightly packed to free her arms enough to divest herself of the coat, which she, in her turn, tried to put lightly over Holdsworth's shoulders. In doing so she touched his shirt.

"Oh, how wet you are!" she cried, in pitying dismay; "and you've hardly got over your fever! Oh, Mr. Holdsworth, I am so sorry!" He turned his head a little, smiling at her.

"If I do catch cold, it is all my fault for having deluded you into staying out here!" But she only murmured again, "I am so sorry."

The minister spoke now. "It is a regular downpour. Please God that the hay is saved! But there is no likelihood of its ceasing, and I had better go home at once, and send you all some wraps; umbrellas will not be safe with yonder thunder and lightning."

Both Holdsworth and I offered to go instead of him; but he was resolved, although perhaps it would have been wiser if Holdsworth, wet as he already was, had kept himself in exercise. As he moved off, Phillis crept out, and could see on to the storm-swept heath. Part of Holdsworth's apparatus still remained exposed to all the rain. Before we could have any warning, she had rushed out of the shelter and collected the various things, and brought them back in triumph to where we crouched. Holdsworth had stood up, uncertain whether to go to her assistance or not. She came running back, her long lovely hair floating and dripping, her eyes glad and bright, and her colour freshened to a glow of health by the exercise and the rain.

"Now, Miss Holman, that's what I call wilful," said Holdsworth, as she gave them to him. "No, I won't thank you" (his looks were thanking her all the time). "My little bit of damp-

ness annoyed you, because you thought I had got wet in your service; so you were determined to make me as uncomfortable as you were yourself. It was an unchristian piece of revenge!"

His tone of badinage (as the French call it) would have been palpable enough to any one accustomed to the world; but Phillis was not, and it distressed or rather bewildered her. "Unchristian" had to her a very serious meaning; it was not a word to be used lightly; and though she did not exactly understand what wrong it was that she was accused of doing, she was evidently desirous to throw off the imputation. At first her earnestness to disclaim unkind motives amused Holdsworth; while his light continuance of the joke perplexed her still more; but at last he said something gravely, and in too low a tone for me to hear, which made her all at once become silent, and called out her blushes. After a while, the minister came back, a moving mass of shawls, cloaks, and umbrellas. Phillis kept very close to her father's side on our return to the farm. She appeared to me to be shrinking away from Holdsworth, while he had not the slightest variation in his manner from what it usually was in his graver moods; kind, protecting, and thoughtful towards her. Of course, there was a great commotion about our wet clothes; but I name the little events of that evening now because I wondered at the time what he had said in that low voice to silence Phillis so effectually, and because, in thinking of their intercourse by the light of future events, that evening stands out with some prominence.

I have said that after our removal to Hornby our communications with the farm became almost of daily occurrence. Cousin Holman and I were the two who had least to do with this intimacy. After Mr. Holdsworth regained his health, he too often talked above her head in intellectual matters, and too often in his light bantering tone for her to feel quite at her ease with him. I really believe that he adopted this latter tone in speaking to her because he did not know what to talk about to a purely motherly woman, whose intellect had never been cultivated, and whose loving heart was entirely occupied with her husband, her child, her household affairs, and, perhaps, a little with the concerns of the members of her husband's congregation, because they, in a way, belonged to her husband. I had noticed before that she had fleeting shadows of jealousy even of Phillis, when her daughter and her husband appeared to have strong interests and sym-

pathies in things which were quite beyond her comprehension. I had noticed it in my first acquaintance with them, I say, and had admired the delicate tact which made the minister, on such occasions, bring the conversation back to such subjects as those on which his wife, with her practical experience of everyday life, was an authority; while Phillis, devoted to her father, unconsciously followed his lead, totally unaware, in her filial reverence, of his motive for doing so.

To return to Holdsworth. The minister had at more than one time spoken of him to me with slight distrust, principally occasioned by the suspicion that his careless words were not always those of soberness and truth. But it was more as a protest against the fascination which the younger man evidently exercised over the elder one—more as it were to strengthen himself against yielding to this fascination—that the minister spoke out to me about this failing of Holdsworth's, as it appeared to him. In return Holdsworth was subdued by the minister's uprightness and goodness, and delighted with his clear intellect—his strong healthy craving after further knowledge. I never met two men who took more thorough pleasure and relish in each other's society. To Phillis his relation continued that of an elder brother: he directed her studies into new paths, he patiently drew out the expression of many of her thoughts, and perplexities, and unformed theories, scarcely ever now falling into the vein of banter which she was so slow to understand.

One day—harvest-time—he had been drawing on a loose piece of paper—sketching ears of corn, sketching carts drawn by bullocks and laden with grapes—all the time talking with Phillis and me, cousin Holman putting in her not pertinent remarks, when suddenly he said to Phillis—

“Keep your head still; I see a sketch! I have often tried to draw your head from memory, and failed; but I think I can do it now. If I succeed I will give it to your mother. You would like a portrait of your daughter as Ceres, would you not, ma'am?”

“I should like a picture of her; yes, very much, thank you, Mr. Holdsworth; but if you put that straw in her hair” (he was holding some wheat ears above her passive head, looking at the effect with an artistic eye), “you'll ruffle her hair. Phillis, my dear, if you're to have your picture taken, go upstairs, and brush your hair smooth.”

"Not on any account. I beg your pardon, but I want hair loosely flowing."

He began to draw, looking intently at Phillis; I could see this stare of his discomposed her—her colour came and went, her breath quickened with the consciousness of his regard; at last, when he said, "Please look at me for a minute or two, I want to get in the eyes," she looked up at him, quivered, and suddenly got up and left the room. He did not say a word, but went on with some other part of the drawing; his silence was unnatural, and his dark cheek blanched a little. Cousin Holman looked up from her work, and put her spectacles down.

"What's the matter? Where is she gone?"

Holdsworth never uttered a word, but went on drawing. I felt obliged to say something; it was stupid enough, but stupidity was better than silence just then.

"I'll go and call her," said I. So I went into the hall, and to the bottom of the stairs; but just as I was going to call Phillis, she came down swiftly with her bonnet on, and saying, "I'm going to father in the five-acre," passed out by the open "rector," right in front of the house-place windows, and out at the little white side-gate. She had been seen by her mother and Holdsworth as she passed; so there was no need for explanation, only cousin Holman and I had a long discussion as to whether she could have found the room too hot, or what had occasioned her sudden departure. Holdsworth was very quiet during all the rest of that day; nor did he resume the portrait-taking by his own desire, only at my cousin Holman's request the next time that he came; and then he said he should not require any more formal sittings for only such a slight sketch as he felt himself capable of making. Phillis was just the same as ever the next time I saw her after her abrupt passing me in the hall. She never gave any explanation of her rush out of the room.

So all things went on, at least as far as my observation reached at the time, or memory can recall now, till the great apple-gathering of the year. The nights were frosty, the mornings and evenings were misty, but at mid-day all was sunny and bright, and it was one mid-day that both of us being on the line near Heath-bridge, and knowing that they were gathering apples at the farm, we resolved to spend the men's dinner-hour in going over there. We found the great clothes-baskets full of apples, scenting the house and stopping up the way; and an universal air of merry

contentment with this the final produce of the year. The yellow leaves hung on the trees ready to flutter down at the slightest puff of air; the great bushes of Michaelmas daisies in the kitchen-garden were making their last show of flowers. We must needs taste the fruit off the different trees, and pass our judgment as to their flavour; and we went away with our pockets stuffed with those that we liked best. As we had passed to the orchard, Holdsworth had admired and spoken about some flower which he saw; it so happened he had never seen this old-fashioned kind since the days of his boyhood. I do not know whether he had thought anything more about this chance speech of his, but I know I had not—when Phillis, who had been missing just at the last moment of our hurried visit, re-appeared with a little nosegay of this same flower, which she was tying up with a blade of grass. She offered it to Holdsworth as he stood with her father on the point of departure. I saw their faces. I saw for the first time an unmistakable look of love in his black eyes; it was more than gratitude for the little attention; it was tender and beseeching—passionate. She shrank from it in confusion, her glance fell on me; and, partly to bide her emotion, partly out of real kindness at what might appear ungracious neglect of an older friend, she flew off to gather me a few late-blooming China roses. But it was the first time she had ever done anything of the kind for me.

We had to walk fast to be back on the line before the men's return, so we spoke but little to each other, and of course the afternoon was too much occupied for us to have any talk. In the evening we went back to our joint lodgings in Hornby. There, on the table, lay a letter for Holdsworth, which had been forwarded to him from Eltham. As our tea was ready, and I had had nothing to eat since morning, I fell to directly, without paying much attention to my companion as he opened and read his letter. He was very silent for a few minutes; at length he said—

“Old fellow! I'm going to leave you?”

“Leave me!” said I. “How? When?”

“This letter ought to have come to hand sooner. It is from Greathed the engineer” (Greaded was well known in those days; he is dead now, and his name half-forgotten); “he wants to see me about some business; in fact, I may as well tell you, Paul, this letter contains a very advantageous proposal for me to go out to Canada, and superintend the making of a line there.”

I was in utter dismay.

"But what will our company say to that?"

"Oh, Greathed has the superintendence of this line, you know; and he is going to be engineer-in-chief to this Canadian line: many of the shareholders in this company are going in for the other, so I fancy they will make no difficulty in following Greathed's lead. He says he has a young man ready to put in my place."

"I hate him," said I.

"Thank you," said Holdsworth, laughing.

"But you must not," he resumed; "for this is a very good thing for me; and, of course, if no one can be found to take my inferior work, I can't be spared to take the superior. I only wish I had received this letter a day sooner. Every hour is of consequence, for Greathed says they are threatening a rival line. Do you know, Paul, I almost fancy I must go up to-night? I can take an engine back to Eltham, and catch the night train. I should not like Greathed to think me lukewarm."

"But you'll come back?" I asked, distressed at the thought of this sudden parting.

"Oh, yes! At least I hope so. They may want me to go out by the next steamer, that will be on Saturday." He began to eat and drink standing, but I think he was quite unconscious of the nature of either his food or his drink.

"I will go to-night. Activity and readiness go a long way in our profession. Remember that, my boy! I hope I shall come back, but if I don't, be sure and recollect all the words of wisdom that have fallen from my lips. Now, where's the portmanteau? If I can gain half-an-hour for a gathering up of my things in Eltham, so much the better. I'm clear of debt anyhow; and what I owe for my lodgings you can pay for me out of my quarter's salary, due November 4th."

"Then you don't think you will come back?" I said dependingly.

"I will come back some time, never fear," said he kindly.

"I may be back in a couple of days, having been found incompetent for the Canadian work; or I may not be wanted to go out so soon as I now anticipate. Anyhow, you don't suppose I am going to forget you, Paul—this work out there ought not to take me above two years, and, perhaps, after that, we may be employed together again."

Perhaps! I had very little hope. The same kind of happy

days never return. However, I did all I could in helping him: clothes, papers, books, instruments; how we pushed and struggled—how I stuffed. All was done in a much shorter time than we had calculated upon, when I had run down to the sheds to order the engine. I was going to drive him to Eltham. We sat ready for a summons. Holdsworth took up the little nose-gay he had brought away from the Hope Farm, and had laid on the mantelpiece on first coming into the room. He smelt at it, and caressed it with his lips.

“What grieves me is that I did not know—that I have not said good-bye to—to them.”

He spoke in a grave tone, the shadow of the coming separation falling upon him at last.

“I will tell them,” said I. “I am sure they will be very sorry.” Then we were silent.

“I never liked any family so much.”

“I knew you would like them.”

“How one’s thoughts change,—this morning I was full of a hope, Paul.” He paused, and then he said—

“You put that sketch in carefully?”

“That outline of a head?” asked I. But I knew he meant an abortive sketch of Phillis, which had not been successful enough for him to complete it with shading or colouring.

“Yes. What a sweet innocent face it is! and yet so—Oh, dear!”

He sighed and got up, his hands in his pockets, to walk up and down the room in evident disturbance of mind. He suddenly stopped opposite to me.

“You’ll tell them how it all was. Be sure and tell the good minister that I was so sorry not to wish him good-bye, and to thank him and his wife for all their kindness. As for Phillis,—please God in two years I’ll be back and tell her myself all in my heart.”

“You love Phillis, then?” said I.

“Love her!—Yes, that I do. Who could help it, seeing her as I have done? Her character as unusual and rare as her beauty! God bless her! God keep her in her high tranquillity, her pure innocence.—Two years! It is a long time. But she lives in such seclusion, almost like the sleeping beauty, Paul,”—(he was smiling now, though a minute before I had thought him on the verge of tears)—“but I shall come back like a prince

from Canada, and waken her to my love. I can't help hoping that it won't be difficult, eh, Paul?"

This touch of coxcomby displeased me a little, and I made no answer. He went on, half apologetically—

"You see, the salary they offer me is large; and besides that, this experience will give me a name which will entitle me to expect a still larger in any future undertaking."

"That won't influence Phillis."

"No! but it will make me more eligible in the eyes of her father and mother."

I made no answer.

"You give me your best wishes, Paul," said he, almost pleading. "You would like me for a cousin?"

I heard the scream and whistle of the engine ready down at the sheds.

"Ay, that I should," I replied, suddenly softened towards my friend now that he was going away. "I wish you were to be married to-morrow, and I were to be best man."

"Thank you, lad. Now for this cursed portmanteau (how the minister would be shocked); but it is heavy!" and off we sped into the darkness.

He only just caught the night train at Eltham, and I slept, desolately enough, at my old lodgings at Miss Dawson's, for that night. Of course the next few days I was busier than ever, doing both his work and my own. Then came a letter from him, very short and affectionate. He was going out in the Saturday steamer, as he had more than half expected; and by the following Monday the man who was to succeed him would be down at Eltham. There was a P.S., with only these words:—

"My nosegay goes with me to Canada, but I do not need it to remind me of Hope Farm."

Saturday came; but it was very late before I could go out to the farm. It was a frosty night, the stars shone clear above me, and the road was crisping beneath my feet. They must have heard my footsteps before I got up to the house. They were sitting at their usual employments in the house-place when I went in. Phillis's eyes went beyond me in their look of welcome, and then fell in quiet disappointment on her work.

"And where's Mr. Holdsworth?" asked cousin Holman, in a minute or two. "I hope his cold is not worse,—I did not like his short cough."

I laughed awkwardly; for I felt that I was the bearer of unpleasant news.

"His cold had need be better—for he's gone—gone away to Canada!"

I purposely looked away from Phillis, as I thus abruptly told my news.

"To Canada!" said the minister.

"Gone away!" said his wife.

But no word from Phillis.

"Yes!" said I. "He found a letter at Hornby when we got home the other night—when we got home from here; he ought to have got it sooner; he was ordered to go up to London directly, and to see some people about a new line in Canada, and he's gone to lay it down; he has sailed to-day. He was sadly grieved not to have time to come out and wish you all good-bye; but he started for London within two hours after he got that letter. He bade me thank you most gratefully for all your kindnesses; he was very sorry not to come here once again."

Phillis got up and left the room with noiseless steps.

"I am very sorry," said the minister.

"I am sure so am I!" said cousin Holman. "I was real fond of that lad ever since I nursed him last June after that bad fever."

The minister went on asking me questions respecting Holdsworth's future plans; and brought out a large old-fashioned atlas, that he might find out the exact places between which the new railroad was to run. Then supper was ready; it was always on the table as soon as the clock on the stairs struck eight, and down came Phillis—her face white and set, her dry eyes looking defiance at me, for I am afraid I hurt her maidenly pride by my glance of sympathetic interest as she entered the room. Never a word did she say—never a question did she ask about the absent friend, yet she forced herself to talk.

And so it was all the next day. She was as pale as could be, like one who has received some shock; but she would not let me talk to her, and she tried hard to behave as usual. Two or three times I repeated, in public, the various affectionate messages to the family with which I was charged by Holdsworth; but she took no more notice of them than if my words had been empty air. And in this mood I left her on the Sabbath evening.

My new master was not half so indulgent as my old one. He kept up strict discipline as to hours, so that it was some time before I could again go out, even to pay a call at the Hope Farm.

It was a cold misty evening in November. The air, even indoors, seemed full of haze; yet there was a great log burning on the hearth, which ought to have made the room cheerful. Cousin Holman and Phillis were sitting at the little round table before the fire, working away in silence. The minister had his books out on the dresser, seemingly deep in study, by the light of his solitary candle; perhaps the fear of disturbing him made the unusual stillness of the room. But a welcome was ready for me from all; not noisy, not demonstrative—that it never was; my damp wrappers were taken off, the next meal was hastened, and a chair placed for me on one side the fire, so that I pretty much commanded a view of the room. My eye caught on Phillis, looking so pale and weary, and with a sort of aching tone (if I may call it so) in her voice. She was doing all the accustomed things—fulfilling small household duties, but somehow differently—I can't tell you how, for she was just as deft and quick in her movements, only the light spring was gone out of them. Cousin Holman began to question me; even the minister put aside his books, and came and stood on the opposite side of the fireplace, to hear what waft of intelligence I brought. I had first to tell them why I had not been to see them for so long—more than five weeks. The answer was simple enough; business and the necessity of attending strictly to the orders of a new superintendent, who had not yet learned trust, much less indulgence. The minister nodded his approval of my conduct, and said—

“Right, Paul! ‘Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.’ I have had my fears lest you had too much license under Edward Holdsworth.”

“Ah,” said cousin Holman, “poor Mr. Holdsworth, he'll be on the salt seas by this time!”

“No, indeed,” said I, “he's landed. I have had a letter from him from Halifax.”

Immediately a shower of questions fell thick upon me. When? How? What was he doing? How did he like it? What sort of a voyage? &c.

“Many is the time we thought of him when the wind was blowing so hard; the old quince-tree is blown down, Paul, that

on the right hand of the great pear-tree ; it was blown down last Monday week, and it was that night that I asked the minister to pray in an especial manner for all them that went down in ships upon the great deep, and he said then, that Mr. Holdsworth might be already landed ; but I said, even if the prayer did not fit him, it was sure to be fitting somebody out at sea, who would need the Lord's care. Both Phillis and I thought he would be a month on the seas."

Phillis began to speak, but her voice did not come rightly at first. It was a little higher pitched than usual, when she said—

"We thought he would be a month if he went in a sailing-vessel, or perhaps longer. I suppose he went in a steamer?"

"Old Obadiah Grimshaw was more than six weeks in getting to America," observed cousin Holman.

"I presume he cannot as yet tell how he likes his new work?" asked the minister.

"No! he is but just landed ; it is but one page long. I'll read it to you, shall I?—

" 'DEAR PAUL,—We are safe on shore, after a rough passage. Thought you would like to hear this, but homeward-bound steamer is making signals for letters. Will write again soon. It seems a year since I left Hornby. Longer since I was at the farm. I have got my nosegay safe. Remember me to the Holmans.—Yours,
' E. H. ' "

"That's not much, certainly," said the minister. "But it's a comfort to know he's on land these blowy nights."

Phillis said nothing. She kept her head bent down over her work ; but I don't think she put a stitch in, while I was reading the letter. I wondered if she understood what nosegay was meant ; but I could not tell. When next she lifted up her face, there were two spots of brilliant colour on the cheeks that had been so pale before. After I had spent an hour or two there, I was bound to return back to Hornby. I told them I did not know when I could come again, as we—by which I mean the company—had undertaken the Hensleydale line ; that branch for which poor Holdsworth was surveying when he caught his fever.

"But you'll have a holiday at Christmas," said my cousin. "Surely they'll not be such heathens as to work you then?"

"Perhaps the lad will be going home," said the minister, as if

to mitigate his wife's urgency ; but for all that, I believe he wanted me to come. Phillis fixed her eyes on me with a wistful expression, hard to resist. But, indeed, I had no thought of resisting. Under my new master I had no hope of a holiday long enough to enable me to go to Birmingham and see my parents with any comfort ; and nothing could be pleasanter to me than to find myself at home at my cousin's for a day or two, then. So it was fixed that we were to meet in Hornby Chapel on Christmas Day, and that I was to accompany them home after service, and if possible to stay over the next day.

I was not able to get to chapel till late on the appointed day, and so I took a seat near the door in considerable shame, although it really was not my fault. When the service was ended I went and stood in the porch to await the coming out of my cousins. Some worthy people belonging to the congregation clustered into a group just where I stood, and exchanged the good wishes of the season. It had just begun to snow, and this occasioned a little delay, and they fell into further conversation. I was not attending to what was not meant for me to hear, till I caught the name of Phillis Holman. And then I listened ; where was the harm ?

" I never saw any one so changed ! "

" I asked Mrs. Holman," quoth another, "' Is Phillis well ? ' and she just said she had been having a cold which had pulled her down ; she did not seem to think anything of it."

" They had best take care of her," said one of the oldest of the good ladies ; " Phillis comes of a family as is not long-lived. Her mother's sister, Lydia Green, her own aunt as was, died of a decline just when she was about this lass's age."

This ill-omened talk was broken in upon by the coming out of the minister, his wife and daughter, and the consequent interchange of Christmas compliments. I had had a shock, and felt heavy-hearted and anxious, and hardly up to making the appropriate replies to the kind greetings of my relations. I looked askance at Phillis. She had certainly grown taller and slighter, and was thinner ; but there was a flush of colour on her face which deceived me for a time, and made me think she was looking as well as ever. I only saw her paleness after we had returned to the farm, and she had subsided into silence and quiet. Her grey eyes looked hollow and sad ; her complexion was of a dead white.

But she went about just as usual ; at least, just as she had done the last time I was there, and seemed to have no ailment ; and I was inclined to think that my cousin was right when she had answered the inquiries of the good-natured gossips, and told them that Phillis was suffering from the consequences of a bad cold, nothing more.

I have said that I was to stay over the next day ; a great deal of snow had come down, but not all, they said, though the ground was covered deep with the white fall. The minister was anxiously housing his cattle, and preparing all things for a long continuance of the same kind of weather. The men were chopping wood, sending wheat to the mill to be ground before the road should become impassable for a cart and horse. My cousin and Phillis had gone upstairs to the apple-room to cover up the fruit from the frost. I had been out the greater part of the morning, and came in about an hour before dinner. To my surprise, knowing how she had planned to be engaged, I found Phillis sitting at the dresser, resting her head on her two hands and reading, or seeming to read. She did not look up when I came in, but murmured something about her mother having sent her down out of the cold. It flashed across me that she was crying, but I put it down to some little spirt of temper ; I might have known better than to suspect the gentle, serene Phillis of crossness, poor girl ; I stooped down, and began to stir and build up the fire, which appeared to have been neglected. While my head was down I heard a noise which made me pause and listen—a sob, an unmistakable, irrepressible sob. I started up.

“Phillis !” I cried, going towards her, with my hand out, to take hers for sympathy with her sorrow, whatever it was. But she was too quick for me, she held her hand out of my grasp, for fear of my detaining her ; as she quickly passed out of the house, she said—

“Don't, Paul ! I cannot bear it !” and passed me, still sobbing, and went out into the keen, open air.

I stood still and wondered. What could have come to Phillis ? The most perfect harmony prevailed in the family, and Phillis especially, good and gentle as she was, was so beloved that if they had found out that her finger ached, it would have cast a shadow over their hearts. Had I done anything to vex her ? No : she was crying before I came in. I went to look at her book—one of those unintelligible Italian books. I could make

neither head nor tail of it. I saw some pencil-notes on the margin, in Holdsworth's handwriting.

Could that be it? Could that be the cause of her white looks, her weary eyes, her wasted figure, her struggling sobs? This idea came upon me like a flash of lightning on a dark night, making all things so clear we cannot forget them afterwards when the gloomy obscurity returns. I was still standing with the book in my hand when I heard cousin Holman's footsteps on the stairs, and as I did not wish to speak to her just then, I followed Phillis's example, and rushed out of the house. The snow was lying on the ground; I could track her feet by the marks they had made; I could see where Rover had joined her. I followed on till I came to a great stack of wood in the orchard—it was built up against the back wall of the outbuildings,—and I recollected then how Phillis had told me, that first day when we strolled about together, that underneath this stack had been her hermitage, her sanctuary, when she was a child; how she used to bring her book to study there, or her work, when she was not wanted in the house; and she had now evidently gone back to this quiet retreat of her childhood, forgetful of the clue given me by her footmarks on the new-fallen snow. The stack was built up very high; but through the interstices of the sticks I could see her figure, although I did not all at once perceive how I could get to her. She was sitting on a log of wood, Rover by her. She had laid her cheek on Rover's head, and had her arm round his neck, partly for a pillow, partly from an instinctive craving for warmth on that bitter cold day. She was making a low moan, like an animal in pain, or perhaps more like the sobbing of the wind. Rover, highly flattered by her caress, and also, perhaps, touched by sympathy, was flapping his heavy tail against the ground, but not otherwise moving a hair, until he heard my approach with his quick erect ears. Then, with a short, abrupt bark of distrust, he sprang up as if to leave his mistress. Both he and I were immovably still for a moment. I was not sure if what I longed to do was wise; and yet I could not bear to see the sweet serenity of my dear cousin's life so disturbed by a suffering which I thought I could assuage. But Rover's ears were sharper than my breathing was noiseless: he heard me, and sprang out from under Phillis's restraining hand.

"Oh, Rover, don't you leave me too," she plained out.

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"Phillis!" said I, seeing by Rover's exit that the entrance to

where she sat was to be found on the other side of the stack. "Phillis, come out! You have got a cold already; and it is not fit for you to sit there on such a day as this. You know how displeased and anxious it would make them all."

She sighed, but obeyed; stooping a little, she came out, and stood upright, opposite to me in the lonely, leafless orchard. Her face looked so meek and so sad that I felt as if I ought to beg her pardon for my necessarily authoritative words.

"Sometimes I feel the house so close," she said; "and I used to sit under the wood-stack when I was a child. It was very kind of you, but there was no need to come after me. I don't catch cold easily."

"Come with me into this cow-house, Phillis. I have got something to say to you; and I can't stand this cold, if you can."

I think she would have fain run away again; but her fit of energy was all spent. She followed me unwillingly enough—that I could see. The place to which I took her was full of the fragrant breath of the cows, and was a little warmer than the outer air. I put her inside, and stood myself in the doorway, thinking how I could best begin. At last I plunged into it.

"I must see that you don't get cold for more reasons than one; if you are ill, Holdsworth will be so anxious and miserable out there" (by which I meant Canada)—

She shot one penetrating look at me, and then turned her face away with a slightly impatient movement. If she could have run away then she would, but I held the means of exit in my own power. "In for a penny in for a pound," thought I, and I went on rapidly, anyhow.

"He talked so much about you, just before he left—that night after he had been here, you know—and you had given him those flowers." She put her hands up to hide her face, but she was listening now—listening with all her ears.

"He had never spoken much about you before, but the sudden going away unlocked his heart, and he told me how he loved you, and how he hoped on his return that you might be his wife."

"Don't," said she, almost gasping out the word, which she had tried once or twice before to speak; but her voice had been choked. Now she put her hand backwards; she had quite turned away from me, and felt for mine. She gave it a soft lingering pressure; and then she put her arms down on the wooden division, and laid her head on it, and cried quiet tears.

I did not understand her at once, and feared lest I had mistaken the whole case, and only annoyed her. I went up to her. "Oh, Phillis! I am so sorry—I thought you would, perhaps, have cared to hear it; he did talk so feelingly, as if he did love you so much, and somehow I thought it would give you pleasure."

She lifted up her head and looked at me. Such a look! Her eyes, glittering with tears as they were, expressed an almost heavenly happiness; her tender mouth was curved with rapture—her colour vivid and blushing; but as if she was afraid her face expressed too much, more than the thankfulness to me she was essaying to speak, she hid it again almost immediately. So it was all right then, and my conjecture was well founded. I tried to remember something more to tell her of what he had said, but again she stopped me.

"Don't," she said. She still kept her face covered and hidden. In half a minute she added, in a very low voice, "Please, Paul, I think I would rather not hear any more—I don't mean but what I have—but what I am very much obliged—— Only—only, I think I would rather hear the rest from himself when he comes back."

And then she cried a little more, in quite a different way. I did not say any more, I waited for her. By-and-by she turned towards me—not meeting my eyes, however; and putting her hand in mine, just as if we were two children, she said—

"We had best go back now—I don't look as if I had been crying, do I?"

"You look as if you had a bad cold," was all the answer I made.

"Oh! but I am—I am quite well, only cold; and a good run will warm me. Come along, Paul."

So we ran, hand in hand, till, just as we were on the threshold of the house, she stopped—

"Paul, please, we won't speak about *that* again."



PART IV.

WHEN I went over on Easter Day, I heard the chapel-gossips complimenting cousin Holman on her daughter's blooming looks, quite forgetful of their sinister prophecies three months before. And I looked at Phillis, and did not wonder at their words. I had not seen her since the day after Christmas Day. I had left the Hope Farm only a few hours after I had told her the news which had quickened her heart into renewed life and vigour. The remembrance of our conversation in the cow-house was vividly in my mind as I looked at her when her bright healthy appearance was remarked upon. As her eyes met mine our mutual recollections flashed intelligence from one to the other. She turned away, her colour heightening as she did so. She seemed to be shy of me for the first few hours after our meeting, and I felt rather vexed with her for her conscious avoidance of me after my long absence. I had stepped a little out of my usual line in telling her what I did; not that I had received any charge of secrecy, or given even the slightest promise to Holdsworth that I would not repeat his words. But I had an uneasy feeling sometimes when I thought of what I had done in the excitement of seeing Phillis so ill and in so much trouble. I meant to have told Holdsworth when I wrote next to him; but when I had my half-finished letter before me I sat with my pen in my hand hesitating. I had more scruple in revealing what I had found out or guessed at of Phillis's secret than in repeating to her his spoken words. I did not think I had any right to say out to him what I believed—namely, that she loved him dearly, and had felt his absence even to the injury of her health. Yet to explain what I had done in telling her how he had spoken about her that last night, it would be necessary to give my reasons, so I had settled within myself to leave it alone. As she had told me she should like to hear all the details and fuller particulars and more explicit declarations first from him, so he should have the pleasure of extracting the delicious tender secret from her maidenly lips. I would not betray my guesses, my surmises, my all but certain knowledge of the state of her heart. I had received two letters from him after he had settled to his business; they were full of life and energy; but in each there had been a message to the family at the Hope Farm of more

than common regard ; and a slight but distinct mention of Phillis herself, showing that she stood single and alone in his memory. These letters I had sent on to the minister, for he was sure to care for them, even supposing he had been unacquainted with their writer, because they were so clever and so picturesquely worded that they brought, as it were, a whiff of foreign atmosphere into his circumscribed life. I used to wonder what was the trade or business in which the minister would not have thriven, mentally I mean, if it had so happened that he had been called into that state. He would have made a capital engineer, that I know ; and he had a fancy for the sea, like many other land-locked men to whom the great deep is a mystery and a fascination. He read law-books with relish ; and once happening to borrow " De Lolme on the British Constitution " (or some such title), he talked about jurisprudence till he was far beyond my depth. But to return to Holdsworth's letters. When the minister sent them back he also wrote out a list of questions suggested by their perusal, which I was to pass on in my answers to Holdsworth, until I thought of suggesting a direct correspondence between the two. That was the state of things as regarded the absent one when I went to the farm for my Easter visit, and when I found Phillis in that state of sly reserve towards me which I have named before. I thought she was ungrateful ; for I was not quite sure if I had done wisely in having told her what I did. I had committed a fault, or a folly, perhaps, and all for her sake ; and here was she, less friendly with me than she had ever been before. This little estrangement only lasted a few hours. I think that as soon as she felt pretty sure of there being no recurrence, either by word, look, or allusion, to the one subject that was predominant in her mind, she came back to her old sisterly ways with me. She had much to tell me of her own familiar interests ; how Rover had been ill, and how anxious they had all of them been, and how, after some little discussion between her father and her, both equally grieved by the sufferings of the old dog, he had been " remembered in the household prayers," and how he had begun to get better only the very next day, and then she would have led me into a conversation on the right ends of prayer, and on special providences, and I know not what ; only I " jibbed " like their old cart-horse, and refused to stir a step in that direction. Then we talked about the different broods of chickens, and she showed me the hens that were good mothers,

and told me the characters of all the poultry with the utmost good faith ; and in all good faith I listened, for I believe there was a great deal of truth in all she said. And then we strolled on into the wood beyond the ash-meadow, and both of us sought for early primroses, and the fresh green crinkled leaves. She was not afraid of being alone with me after the first day. I never saw her so lovely, or so happy. I think she hardly knew why she was so happy all the time. I can see her now, standing under the budding branches of the grey trees, over which a tinge of green seemed to be deepening day after day, her sun-bonnet fallen back on her neck, her hands full of delicate wood-flowers, quite unconscious of my gaze, but intent on sweet mockery of some bird in neighbouring bush or tree. She had the art of warbling, and replying to the notes of different birds, and knew their song, their habits and ways, more accurately than any one else I ever knew. She had often done it at my request the spring before ; but this year she really gurgled, and whistled, and warbled just as they did, out of the very fulness and joy of her heart. She was more than ever the very apple of her father's eye ; her mother gave her both her own share of love and that of the dead child who had died in infancy. I have heard cousin Holman murmur, after a long dreary look at Phillis, and tell herself how like she was growing to Johnnie, and soothe herself with plaintive inarticulate sounds, and many gentle shakes of the head, for the aching sense of loss she would never get over in this world. The old servants about the place had the dumb loyal attachment to the child of the land, common to most agricultural labourers ; not often stirred into activity or expression. My cousin Phillis was like a rose that had come to full bloom on the sunny side of a lonely house, sheltered from storms. I have read in some book of poetry—

“ A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love.”

And somehow those lines always reminded me of Phillis ; yet they were not true of her either. I never heard her praised ; and out of her own household there were very few to love her ; but though no one spoke out their approbation, she always did right in her parents' eyes, out of her natural simple goodness and wisdom. Holdsworth's name was never mentioned between

us when we were alone ; but I had sent on his letters to the minister, as I have said ; and more than once he began to talk about our absent friend, when he was smoking his pipe after the day's work was done. Then Phillis hung her head a little over her work, and listened in silence.

" I miss him more than I thought for ; no offence to you, Paul. I said once his company was like dram-drinking ; that was before I knew him ; and perhaps I spoke in a spirit of judgment. To some men's minds everything presents itself strongly, and they speak accordingly ; and so did he. And I thought in my vanity of censorship that his were not true and sober words ; they would not have been if I had used them, but they were so to a man of his class of perceptions. I thought of the measure with which I had been meting to him when Brother Robinson was here last Thursday, and told me that a poor little quotation I was making from the *Georgics* savoured of vain babbling and profane heathenism. He went so far as to say that by learning other languages than our own, we were flying in the face of the Lord's purpose when He had said, at the building of the Tower of Babel, that He would confound their languages so that they should not understand each other's speech. As Brother Robinson was to me, so was I to the quick wits, bright senses, and ready words of Holdsworth."

The first little cloud upon my peace came in the shape of a letter from Canada, in which there were two or three sentences that troubled me more than they ought to have done, to judge merely from the words employed. It was this :—" I should feel dreary enough in this out-of-the-way place if it were not for a friendship I have formed with a French Canadian of the name of Ventadour. He and his family are a great resource to me in the long evenings. I never heard such delicious vocal music as the voices of these Ventadour boys and girls in their part songs ; and the foreign element retained in their characters and manner of living reminds me of some of the happiest days of my life. Lucille, the second daughter, is curiously like Phillis Holman." In vain I said to myself that it was probably this likeness that made him take pleasure in the society of the Ventadour family. In vain I told my anxious fancy that nothing could be more natural than this intimacy, and that there was no sign of its leading to any consequence that ought to disturb me. I had a presentiment, and I was disturbed ; and I could not reason it

away. I dare say my presentiment was rendered more persistent and keen by the doubts which would force themselves into my mind, as to whether I had done well in repeating Holdsworth's words to Phillis. Her state of vivid happiness this summer was markedly different to the peaceful serenity of former days. If in my thoughtfulness at noticing this I caught her eye, she blushed and sparkled all over, guessing that I was remembering our joint secret. Her eyes fell before mine, as if she could hardly bear me to see the revelation of their bright glances. And yet I considered again, and comforted myself by the reflection that, if this change had been anything more than my silly fancy, her father or her mother would have perceived it. But they went on in tranquil unconsciousness and undisturbed peace.

A change in my own life was quickly approaching. In the July of this year my occupation on the —— railway and its branches came to an end. The lines were completed, and I was to leave ——shire, to return to Birmingham, where there was a niche already provided for me in my father's prosperous business. But before I left the north it was an understood thing amongst us all that I was to go and pay a visit of some weeks at the Hope Farm. My father was as much pleased at this plan as I was; and the dear family of cousins often spoke of things to be done, and sights to be shown me, during this visit. My want of wisdom in having told "that thing" (under such ambiguous words I concealed the injudicious confidence I had made to Phillis) was the only drawback to my anticipations of pleasure.

The ways of life were too simple at the Hope Farm for my coming to them to make the slightest disturbance. I knew my room, like a son of the house. I knew the regular course of their days, and that I was expected to fall into it, like one of the family. Deep summer peace brooded over the place; the warm golden air was filled with the murmur of insects near at hand, the more distant sound of voices out in the fields, the clear far-away rumble of carts over the stone-paved lanes miles away. The heat was too great for the birds to be singing; only now and then one might hear the wood-pigeons in the trees beyond the ash-field. The cattle stood knee-deep in the pond, flicking their tails about to keep off the flies. The minister stood in the hay-field, without hat or cravat, coat or waistcoat, panting and smiling. Phillis had been leading the row of farm-servants, turn-

ing the swathes of fragrant hay with measured movement. She went to the end—to the hedge, and then, throwing down her rake, she came to me with her free sisterly welcome. "Go, Paul!" said the minister. "We need all hands to make use of the sunshine to-day. 'Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.' It will be a healthy change of work for thee, lad; and I find my best rest in change of work." So off I went, a willing labourer, following Phillis's lead; it was the primitive distinction of rank; the boy who frightened the sparrows off the fruit was the last in our rear. We did not leave off till the red sun was gone down behind the fir-trees bordering the common. Then we went home to supper—prayers—to bed; some bird singing far into the night, as I heard it through my open window, and the poultry beginning their clatter and cackle in the earliest morning. I had carried what luggage I immediately needed with me from my lodgings, and the rest was to be sent by the carrier. He brought it to the farm betimes that morning, and along with it he brought a letter or two that had arrived since I had left. I was talking to cousin Holman—about my mother's ways of making bread, I remember; cousin Holman was questioning me, and had got me far beyond my depth—in the house-place, when the letters were brought in by one of the men, and I had to pay the carrier for his trouble before I could look at them. A bill—a Canadian letter! What instinct made me so thankful that I was alone with my dear unobservant cousin? What made me hurry them away into my coat-pocket? I do not know. I felt strange and sick, and made irrelevant answers, I am afraid. Then I went to my room, ostensibly to carry up my boxes. I sat on the side of my bed and opened my letter from Holdsworth. It seemed to me as if I had read its contents before, and knew exactly what he had got to say. I knew he was going to be married to Lucille Ventadour; nay, that he *was* married; for this was the 5th of July, and he wrote word that his marriage was fixed to take place on the 29th of June. I knew all the reasons he gave, all the raptures he went into. I held the letter loosely in my hands, and looked into vacancy, yet I saw a chaffinch's nest on the lichen-covered trunk of an old apple-tree opposite my window, and saw the mother-bird come fluttering in to feed her brood—and yet I did not see it, although it seemed to me afterwards as if I could have drawn every fibre, every feather. I was

stirred up to action by the merry sound of voices and the clump of rustic feet coming home for the mid-day meal. I knew I must go down to dinner; I knew, too, I must tell Phillis; for in his happy egotism, his new-fangled foppery, Holdsworth had put in a P.S., saying that he should send wedding-cards to me and some other Hornby and Eltham acquaintances, and "to his kind friends at Hope Farm." Phillis had faded away to one among several "kind friends." I don't know how I got through dinner that day. I remember forcing myself to eat, and talking hard; but I also recollect the wondering look in the minister's eyes. He was not one to think evil without cause; but many a one would have taken me for drunk. As soon as I decently could I left the table, saying I would go out for a walk. At first I must have tried to stun reflection by rapid walking, for I had lost myself on the high moorlands far beyond the familiar gorse-covered common, before I was obliged for very weariness to slacken my pace. I kept wishing—oh! how fervently wishing I had never committed that blunder; that the one little half-hour's indiscretion could be blotted out. Alternating with this was anger against Holdsworth; unjust enough, I dare say. I suppose I stayed in that solitary place for a good hour or more, and then I turned homewards, resolving to get over the telling Phillis at the first opportunity, but shrinking from the fulfilment of my resolution so much that when I came into the house and saw Phillis (doors and windows open wide in the sultry weather) alone in the kitchen, I became quite sick with apprehension. She was standing by the dresser, cutting up a great household loaf into hunches of bread for the hungry labourers who might come in any minute, for the heavy thunderclouds were overspreading the sky. She looked round as she heard my step.

"You should have been in the field, helping with the hay," said she, in her calm, pleasant voice. I had heard her as I came near the house softly chanting some hymn-tune, and the peacefulness of that seemed to be brooding over her now.

"Perhaps I should. It looks as if it was going to rain."

"Yes, there is thunder about. Mother has had to go to bed with one of her bad headaches. Now you are come in"—

"Phillis," said I, rushing at my subject and interrupting her, "I went a long walk to think over a letter I had this morning—a letter from Canada. You don't know how it has grieved me." I held it out to her as I spoke. Her colour changed a little, but it

was more the reflection of my face, I think, than because she formed any definite idea from my words. Still she did not take the letter. I had to bid her read it, before she quite understood what I wished. She sat down rather suddenly as she received it into her hands; and, spreading it on the dresser before her, she rested her forehead on the palms of her hands, her arms supported on the table, her figure a little averted, and her countenance thus shaded. I looked out of the open window; my heart was very heavy. How peaceful it all seemed in the farmyard! Peace and plenty. How still and deep was the silence of the house! Tick-tick went the unseen clock on the wide staircase. I had heard the rustle once, when she turned over the page of thin paper. She must have read to the end. Yet she did not move, or say a word, or even sigh. I kept on looking out of the window, my hands in my pockets. I wonder how long that time really was? It seemed to me interminable—unbearable. At length I looked round at her. She must have felt my look, for she changed her attitude with a quick sharp movement, and caught my eyes.

“Don't look so sorry, Paul,” she said. “Don't, please. I can't bear it. There is nothing to be sorry for. I think not, at least. You have not done wrong, at any rate.” I felt that I groaned, but I don't think she heard me. “And he,—there's no wrong in his marrying, is there? I'm sure I hope he'll be happy. Oh! how I hope it!” These last words were like a wail; but I believe she was afraid of breaking down, for she changed the key in which she spoke, and hurried on. “Lucille—that's our English Lucy, I suppose? Lucille Holdsworth! It's a pretty name; and I hope—I forget what I was going to say. Oh! it was this. Paul, I think we need never speak about this again; only remember you are not to be sorry. You have not done wrong; you have been very, *very* kind; and if I see you looking grieved I don't know what I might do;—I might break down, you know.”

I think she was on the point of doing so then, but the dark storm came dashing down, and the thundercloud broke right above the house, as it seemed. Her mother, roused from sleep, called out for Phillis; the men and women from the hayfield came running into shelter, drenched through. The minister followed, smiling, and not unpleasantly excited by the war of elements; for, by dint of hard work through the long summer's day, the greater part of the hay was safely housed in the barn in the field. Once or twice in the succeeding bustle I came across Phillis,

always busy, and, as it seemed to me, always doing the right thing. When I was alone in my own room at night I allowed myself to feel relieved: and to believe that the worst was over, and was not so very bad after all. But the succeeding days were very miserable. . Sometimes I thought it must be my fancy that falsely represented Phillis to me as strangely changed, for surely, if this idea of mine was well-founded, her parents—her father and mother—her own flesh and blood—would have been the first to perceive it. Yet they went on in their household peace and content; if anything, a little more cheerfully than usual, for the “harvest of the first fruits,” as the minister called it, had been more bounteous than usual, and there was plenty all around, in which the humblest labourer was made to share. After the one thunderstorm, came one or two lovely serene summer days, during which the hay was all carried; and then succeeded long soft rains filling the ears of corn, and causing the mown grass to spring afresh. The minister allowed himself a few more hours of relaxation and home enjoyment than usual during this wet spell: hard earth-bound frost was his winter holiday; these wet days, after the hay harvest, his summer holiday. We sate with open windows, the fragrance and the freshness called out by the soft-falling rain filling the house-place; while the quiet ceaseless patter among the leaves outside ought to have had the same lulling effect as all other gentle perpetual sounds, such as mill-wheels and bubbling springs, have on the nerves of happy people. But two of us were not happy. I was sure enough of myself, for one. I was worse than sure,—I was wretchedly anxious about Phillis. Ever since that day of the thunderstorm there had been a new, sharp, discordant sound to me in her voice, a sort of jangle in her tone; and her restless eyes had no quietness in them; and her colour came and went without a cause that I could find out. The minister, happy in ignorance of what most concerned him, brought out his books; his learned volumes and classics. Whether he read and talked to Phillis, or to me, I do not know; but feeling by instinct that she was not, could not be, attending to the peaceful details, so strange and foreign to the turmoil in her heart, I forced myself to listen, and if possible to understand.

“Look here!” said the minister, tapping the old vellum-bound book he held; “in the first *Georgic* he speaks of rolling and irrigation; a little further on he insists on choice of the best seed, and advises us to keep the drains clear. Again, no Scotch

farmer could give shrewder advice than to cut light meadows while the dew is on, even though it involve night-work. It is all living truth in these days." He began beating time with a ruler upon his knee, to some Latin lines he read aloud just then. I suppose the monotonous chant irritated Phillis to some irregular energy, for I remember the quick knotting and breaking of the thread with which she was sewing. I never hear that snap repeated now, without suspecting some sting or stab troubling the heart of the worker. Cousin Holman, at her peaceful knitting, noticed the reason why Phillis had so constantly to interrupt the progress of her seam.

"It is bad thread, I'm afraid," she said, in a gentle, sympathetic voice. But it was too much for Phillis.

"The thread is bad—everything is bad—I am so tired of it all!" And she put down her work, and hastily left the room. I do not suppose that in all her life Phillis had ever shown so much temper before. In many a family the tone, the manner, would not have been noticed; but here it fell with a sharp surprise upon the sweet, calm atmosphere of home. The minister put down ruler and book, and pushed his spectacles up to his forehead. The mother looked distressed for a moment, and then smoothed her features and said in an explanatory tone—"It's the weather, I think. Some people feel it different to others. It always brings on a headache with me." She got up to follow her daughter, but half-way to the door she thought better of it, and came back to her seat. Good mother! she hoped the better to conceal the unusual spirit of temper, by pretending not to take much notice of it. "Go on, minister," she said; "it is very interesting what you are reading about, and when I don't quite understand it, I like the sound of your voice." So he went on, but languidly and irregularly, and beat no more time with his ruler to any Latin lines. When the dusk came on, early that July night because of the cloudy sky, Phillis came softly back, making as though nothing had happened. She took up her work, but it was too dark to do many stitches; and she dropped it soon. Then I saw her hand stole into her mother's, and how this latter fondled it with quiet little caresses, while the minister, as fully aware as I was of this tender pantomime, went on talking in a happier tone of voice about things as uninteresting to him, at the time, I verily believe, as they were to me; and that is saying a good deal, and shows how much more real

what was passing before him was, even to a farmer, than the agricultural customs of the ancients.

I remember one thing more—an attack which Betty the servant made upon me one day as I came in through the kitchen where she was churning, and stopped to ask her for a drink of butter-milk.

“I say, cousin Paul” (she had adopted the family habit of addressing me generally as cousin Paul, and always speaking of me in that form), “something’s amiss with our Phillis, and I reckon you’ve a good guess what it is. She’s not one to take up wi’ such as you” (not complimentary, but that Betty never was, even to those for whom she felt the highest respect), “but I’d as lief yon Holdsworth had never come near us. So there you’ve a bit o’ my mind.”

And a very unsatisfactory bit it was. I did not know what to answer to the glimpse at the real state of the case implied in the shrewd woman’s speech; so I tried to put her off by assuming surprise at her first assertion.

“Amiss with Phillis! I should like to know why you think anything is wrong with her. She looks as blooming as any one can do.”

“Poor lad! you’re but a big child, after all; and you’ve likely never heard of a fever-flush. But you know better nor that, my fine fellow! so don’t think for to put me off wi’ blooms and blossoms and such-like talk. What makes her walk about for hours and hours o’ nights when she used to be abed and asleep? I sleep next room to her, and hear her plain as can be. What makes her come in panting and ready to drop into that chair,”—nodding to one close to the door—“and it’s ‘Oh! Betty, some water, please?’ That’s the way she comes in now, when she used to come back as fresh and bright as she went out. If yon friend o’ yours has played her false, he’s a deal for t’ answer for: she’s a lass who’s as sweet and as sound as a nut, and the very apple of her father’s eye, and of her mother’s too, only wi’ her she ranks second to th’ minister. You’ll have to look after yon chap, for I, for one, will stand no wrong to our Phillis.”

What was I to do, or to say? I wanted to justify Holdsworth, to keep Phillis’s secret, and to pacify the woman all in the same breath. I did not take the best course, I’m afraid.

“I don’t believe Holdsworth ever spoke a word of—of love to her in all his life. I am sure he didn’t.”

“Ay, ay! but there’s eyes, and there’s hands, as well as

tongues; and a man has two o' th' one and but one o' t'other."

"And she's so young; do you suppose her parents would not have seen it?"

"Well! if you ax me that, I'll say out boldly, 'No.' They've called her 'the child' so long—'the child' is always their name for her when they talk on her between themselves, as if never anybody else had a ewe-lamb before them—that she's grown up to be a woman under their very eyes, and they look on her still as if she were in her long clothes. And you ne'er heard on a man falling in love wi' a babby in long clothes!"

"No!" said I, half laughing. But she went on as grave as a judge.

"Ay! you see you'll laugh at the bare thought on it—and I'll be bound th' minister, though he's not a laughing man, would ha' sniggled at th' notion of falling in love wi' the child. Where's Holdsworth off to?"

"Canada," said I shortly.

"Canada here, Canada there," she replied testily. "Tell me how far he's off, instead of giving me your gibberish. Is he a two days' journey away? or a three? or a week?"

"He's ever so far off—three weeks at the least," cried I in despair. "And he's either married, or just going to be. So there!" I expected a fresh burst of anger. But no; the matter was too serious. Betty sate down, and kept silence for a minute or two. She looked so miserable and downcast, that I could not help going on, and taking her a little into my confidence.

"It is quite true what I said. I know he never spoke a word to her. I think he liked her, but it's all over now. The best thing we can do—the best and kindest for her—and I know you love her, Betty"—

"I nursed her in my arms; I gave her little brother his last taste o' earthly food," said Betty, putting her apron up to her eyes.

"Well! don't let us show her we guess that she is grieving; she'll get over it the sooner. Her father and mother don't even guess at it, and we must make as if we didn't. It's too late now to do anything else."

"I'll never let on; I know nought. I've known true love mysel', in my day. But I wish he'd been farred before he ever came near this house, with his 'Please Betty' this, and 'Please

Betty' that, and drinking up our new milk as if he'd been a cat. I hate such beguiling ways."

I thought it was as well to let her exhaust herself in abusing the absent Holdsworth; if it was shabby and treacherous in me, I came in for my punishment directly.

"It's a caution to a man how he goes about beguiling. Some men do it as easy and innocent as cooing doves. Don't you be none of 'em, my lad. Not that you've got the gifts to do it, either; you're no great shakes to look at, neither for figure nor yet for face, and it would need be a deaf adder to be taken in wi' your words, though there may be no great harm in 'em." A lad of nineteen or twenty is not flattered by such an outspoken opinion even from the oldest and ugliest of her sex; and I was only too glad to change the subject by my repeated injunctions to keep Phillis's secret. The end of our conversation was this speech of her's—

"You great gaupus, for all you're called cousin o' th' minister—many a one is cursed wi' fools for cousins—d'ye think I can't see sense except through your spectacles? I give you leave to cut out my tongue, and nail it up on th' barn-door for a caution to magpies, if I let out on that poor wench, either to herself, or any one that is hers, as the Bible says. Now you've heard me speak Scripture language, perhaps you'll be content, and leave me my kitchen to myself."

During all these days, from the 5th of July to the 17th, I must have forgotten what Holdsworth had said about sending cards. And yet I think I could not have quite forgotten; but, once having told Phillis about his marriage, I must have looked upon the after-consequence of cards as of no importance. At any rate, they came upon me as a surprise at last. The penny-post reform, as people call it, had come into operation a short time before; but the never-ending stream of notes and letters which seem now to flow in upon most households had not yet begun its course; at least in those remote parts. There was a post-office at Hornby; and an old fellow, who stowed away the few letters in any or all his pockets, as it best suited him, was the letter-carrier to Heathbridge and the neighbourhood. I have often met him in the lanes thereabouts, and asked him for letters. Sometimes I have come upon him, sitting on the hedge-bank resting; and he has begged me to read him an address, too illegible for his spectacled eyes to decipher. When I used to inquire if he had anything for me,

or for Holdsworth (he was not particular to whom he gave up the letters, so that he got rid of them somehow, and could set off homewards), he would say he thought that he had, for such was his invariable safe form of answer; and would fumble in breast-pockets, waistcoat-pockets, breeches-pockets, and, as a last resource, in coat-tail pockets; and at length try to comfort me, if I looked disappointed, by telling me, "Hoo had missed this toime, but was sure to write to-morrow;" "hoo" representing an imaginary sweetheart.

Sometimes I had seen the minister bring home a letter which he had found lying for him at the little shop that was the post-office at Heathbridge, or from the grander establishment at Hornby. Once or twice Josiah, the carter, remembered that the old letter-carrier had trusted him with an epistle to "Measter," as they had met in the lanes. I think it must have been about ten days after my arrival at the farm, and my talk to Phillis cutting bread-and-butter at the kitchen dresser, before the day on which the minister suddenly spoke at the dinner-table, and said—

"By-the-bye, I've got a letter in my pocket. Reach me my coat here, Phillis." The weather was still sultry, and for coolness and ease the minister was sitting in his shirt-sleeves. "I went to Heathbridge about the paper they had sent me, which spoils all the pens—and I called at the post-office, and found a letter for me, unpaid,—and they did not like to trust it to old Zekiel. Ay! here it is! Now we shall hear news of Holdsworth,—I thought I'd keep it till we were all together." My heart seemed to stop beating, and I hung my head over my plate, not daring to look up. What would come of it now? What was Phillis doing? How was she looking? A moment of suspense,—and then he spoke again. "Why? what's this? Here are two visiting tickets with his name on, no writing at all. No! it's not his name on both. Mrs. Holdsworth. The young man has gone and got married." I lifted my head at these words; I could not help looking just for one instant at Phillis. It seemed to me as if she had been keeping watch over my face and ways. Her face was brilliantly flushed; her eyes were dry and glittering; but she did not speak; her lips were set together almost as if she was pinching them tight to prevent words or sounds coming out. Cousin Holman's face expressed surprise and interest.

"Well!" said she, "who'd ha' thought it? He's made

quick work of his wooing and wedding. I'm sure I wish him happy. Let me see"—counting on her fingers,—“October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May, June, July,—at least we're at the 28th,—it is nearly ten months after all, and reckon a month each way off”——

“Did you know of this news before?” said the minister, turning sharp round on me, surprised, I suppose, at my silence,—hardly suspicious, as yet.

“I knew—I had heard—something. It is to a French Canadian young lady,” I went on, forcing myself to talk. “Her name is Ventadour.”

“Lucille Ventadour!” said Phillis, in a sharp voice, out of tune.

“Then you knew, too!” exclaimed the minister.

We both spoke at once. I said, “I heard of the probability of——, and told Phillis.” She said, “He is married to Lucille Ventadour, of French descent; one of a large family near St. Meurice; am not I right?” I nodded. “Paul told me,—that is all we know, is not it? Did you see the Howsons, father, in Heathbridge?” and she forced herself to talk more than she had done for several days, asking many questions, trying, as I could see, to keep the conversation off the one raw surface, on which to touch was agony. I had less self-command; but I followed her lead. I was not so much absorbed in the conversation but what I could see that the minister was puzzled and uneasy; though he seconded Phillis's efforts to prevent her mother from recurring to the great piece of news, and uttering continual exclamations of wonder and surprise. But with that one exception we were all disturbed out of our natural equanimity, more or less. Every day, every hour, I was reproaching myself more and more for my blundering officiousness. If only I had held my foolish tongue for that one half-hour; if only I had not been in such impatient haste to do something to relieve pain! I could have knocked my stupid head against the wall in my remorse. Yet all I could do now was to second the brave girl in her efforts to conceal her disappointment and keep her maidenly secret. But I thought that dinner would never, never come to an end. I suffered for her, even more than for myself. Until now everything which I had heard spoken in that happy household were simple words of true meaning.

If we had aught to say, we said it; and if any one preferred silence, nay, if all did so, there would have been no spasmodic, forced efforts to talk for the sake of talking, or to keep off intrusive thoughts or suspicions.

At length we got up from our places, and prepared to disperse; but two or three of us had lost our zest and interest in the daily labour. The minister stood looking out of the window in silence, and when he roused himself to go out to the fields where his labourers were working, it was with a sigh; and he tried to avert his troubled face as he passed us on his way to the door. When he had left us, I caught sight of Phillis's face, as, thinking herself unobserved, her countenance relaxed for a moment or two into sad, woeful weariness. She started into briskness again when her mother spoke, and hurried away to do some little errand at her bidding. When we two were alone, cousin Holman recurred to Holdsworth's marriage. She was one of those people who like to view an event from every side of probability, or even possibility; and she had been cut short from indulging herself in this way during dinner.

"To think of Mr. Holdsworth's being married! I can't get over it, Paul. Not but what he was a very nice young man! I don't like her name, though; it sounds foreign. Say it again, my dear. I hope she'll know how to take care of him, English fashion. He is not strong, and if she does not see that his things are well aired, I should be afraid of the old cough."

"He always said he was stronger than he had ever been before, after that fever."

"He might think so, but I have my doubts. He was a very pleasant young man, but he did not stand nursing very well. He got tired of being coddled, as he called it. I hope they'll soon come back to England, and then he'll have a chance for his health. I wonder now, if she speaks English; but, to be sure, he can speak foreign tongues like anything, as I've heard the minister say."

And so we went on for some time, till she became drowsy over her knitting, on the sultry summer afternoon; and I stole away for a walk, for I wanted some solitude in which to think over things, and, alas! to blame myself with poignant stabs of remorse.

I lounged lazily as soon as I got to the wood. Here and

there the bubbling, brawling brook circled round a great stone, or a root of an old tree, and made a pool ; otherwise it coursed brightly over the gravel and stones. I stood by one of these for more than half-an-hour, or, indeed, longer, throwing bits of wood or pebbles into the water, and wondering what I could do to remedy the present state of things. Of course all my meditation was of no use ; and at length the distant sound of the horn employed to tell the men far afield to leave off work, warned me that it was six o'clock, and time for me to go home. Then I caught wafts of the loud-voiced singing of the evening psalm. As I was crossing the ash-field, I saw the minister at some distance talking to a man. I could not hear what they were saying, but I saw an impatient or dissentient (I could not tell which) gesture on the part of the former, who walked quickly away, and was apparently absorbed in his thoughts, for though he passed within twenty yards of me, as both our paths converged towards home, he took no notice of me. He passed the evening in a way which was even worse than dinner-time. The minister was silent, depressed, even irritable. Poor cousin Holman was utterly perplexed by this unusual frame of mind and temper in her husband ; she was not well herself, and was suffering from the extreme and sultry heat, which made her less talkative than usual. Phillis, usually so reverently tender to her parents, so soft, so gentle, seemed now to take no notice of the unusual state of things, but talked to me—to any one, on indifferent subjects, regardless of her father's gravity, of her mother's piteous looks of bewilderment. But once my eyes fell upon her hands, concealed under the table, and I could see the passionate, convulsive manner in which she laced and interlaced her fingers perpetually, wringing them together from time to time, wringing till the compressed flesh became perfectly white. What could I do? I talked with her, as I saw she wished ; her grey eyes had dark circles round them, and a strange kind of dark light in them ; her cheeks were flushed, but her lips were white and wan. I wondered that others did not read these signs as clearly as I did. But perhaps they did ; I think, from what came afterwards, the minister did.

Poor cousin Holman ! she worshipped her husband ; and the outward signs of his uneasiness were more patent to her simple heart than were her daughter's. After a while she could bear it

no longer. She got up, and, softly laying her hand on his broad stooping shoulder, she said—

“What is the matter, minister? Has anything gone wrong?”

He started as if from a dream. Phillis hung her head, and caught her breath in terror at the answer she feared. But he, looking round with a sweeping glance, turned his broad, wise face up to his anxious wife, and forced a smile, and took her hand in a reassuring manner.

“I am blaming myself, dear. I have been overcome with anger this afternoon. I scarcely knew what I was doing, but I turned away Timothy Cooper. He has killed the Ribstone pippin at the corner of the orchard; gone and piled the quicklime for the mortar for the new stable wall against the trunk of the tree—stupid fellow! killed the tree outright—and it loaded with apples!”

“And Ribstone pippins are so scarce,” said sympathetic cousin Holman.

“Ay! But Timothy is but a half-wit; and he has a wife and children. He had often put me to it sore, with his slothful ways, but I had laid it before the Lord, and striven to bear with him. But I will not stand it any longer, it's past my patience. And he has notice to find another place. Wife, we won't talk more about it.” He took her hand gently off his shoulder, touched it with his lips; but relapsed into a silence as profound, if not quite so morose in appearance, as before. I could not tell why, but this bit of talk between her father and mother seemed to take all the factitious spirits out of Phillis. She did not speak now, but looked out of the open casement at the calm large moon, slowly moving through the twilight sky. Once I thought her eyes were filling with tears; but, if so, she shook them off, and arose with alacrity when her mother, tired and dispirited, proposed to go to bed immediately after prayers. We all said good-night in our separate ways to the minister, who still sat at the table with the great Bible open before him, not much looking up at any of our salutations, but returning them kindly. But when I, last of all, was on the point of leaving the room, he said, still scarcely looking up—

“Paul, you will oblige me by staying here a few minutes. I would fain have some talk with you.”

I knew what was coming, all in a moment. I carefully shut-to the door, put out my candle, and sat down to my fate. He seemed to find some difficulty in beginning, for, if I had not

heard that he wanted to speak to me, I should never have guessed it, he seemed so much absorbed in reading a chapter to the end. Suddenly he lifted his head up and said—

“It is about that friend of yours, Holdsworth! Paul, have you any reason for thinking he has played tricks upon Phillis?”

I saw that his eyes were blazing with such a fire of anger at the bare idea, that I lost all my presence of mind, and only repeated—

“Played tricks on Phillis!”

“Ay! you know what I mean: made love to her, courted her, made her think that he loved her, and then gone away and left her. Put it as you will, only give me an answer of some kind or another—a true answer, I mean—and don’t repeat my words, Paul.”

He was shaking all over as he said this. I did not delay a moment in answering him—

“I do not believe that Edward Holdsworth ever played tricks on Phillis, ever made love to her; he never, to my knowledge, made her believe that he loved her.”

I stopped; I wanted to nerve up my courage for a confession, yet I wished to save the secret of Phillis’s love for Holdsworth as much as I could; that secret which she had so striven to keep sacred and safe; and I had need of some reflection before I went on with what I had to say.

He began again before I had quite arranged my manner of speech. It was almost as if to himself—“She is my only child; my little daughter! She is hardly out of childhood; I have thought to gather her under my wings for years to come; her mother and I would lay down our lives to keep her from harm and grief.” Then raising his voice, and looking at me, he said, “Something has gone wrong with the child; and it seems to me to date from the time she heard of that marriage. It is hard to think that you may know more of her secret cares and sorrows than I do,—but perhaps you do, Paul, perhaps you do,—only, if it be not a sin, tell me what I can do to make her happy again; tell me.”

“It will not do much good, I am afraid,” said I, “but I will own how wrong I did; I don’t mean wrong in the way of sin, but in the way of judgment. Holdsworth told me just before he went that he loved Phillis, and hoped to make her his wife, and I told her.”

There! it was out; all my part in it, at least; and I set my lips tight together, and waited for the words to come. I did not see his face; I looked straight at the wall opposite; but I heard him once begin to speak, and then turn over the leaves in the book before him. How awfully still that room was! The air outside, how still it was! The open window let in no rustle of leaves, no twitter or movement of birds—no sound whatever. The clock on the stairs—the minister's hard breathing—was it to go on for ever? Impatient beyond bearing at the deep quiet, I spoke again—

—“I did it for the best, as I thought.”

The minister shut the book to hastily, and stood up. Then I saw how angry he was.

“For the best, do you say? It was best, was it, to go and tell a young girl what you never told a word of to her parents, who trusted you like a son of their own?”

He began walking about, up and down the room close under the open windows, churning up his bitter thoughts of me.

“To put such thoughts into the child's head,” continued he; “to spoil her peaceful maidenhood with talk about another man's love; and such love, too,” he spoke scornfully now—“a love that is ready for any young woman. Oh, the misery in my poor little daughter's face to-day at dinner—the misery, Paul! I thought you were one to be trusted—your father's son too, to go and put such thoughts into the child's mind; you two talking together about that man wishing to marry her.”

I could not help remembering the pinafore, the childish garment which Phillis wore so long, as if her parents were unaware of her progress towards womanhood. Just in the same way the minister spoke and thought of her now, as a child, whose innocent peace I had spoiled by vain and foolish talk. I knew that the truth was different, though I could hardly have told it now; but, indeed, I never thought of trying to tell; it was far from my mind to add one iota to the sorrow which I had caused. The minister went on walking, occasionally stopping to move things on the table, or articles of furniture, in a sharp, impatient, meaningless way, then he began again—

“So young, so pure from the world! how could you go and talk to such a child, raising hopes, exciting feelings—all to end thus; and best so, even though I saw her poor piteous face look as it did? I can't forgive you, Paul; it was more

than wrong—it was wicked—to go and repeat that man's words."

His back was now to the door, and, in listening to his low angry tones, he did not hear it slowly open, nor did he see Phillis, standing just within the room, until he turned round; then he stood still. She must have been half undressed; but she had covered herself with a dark winter cloak, which fell in long folds to her white, naked, noiseless feet. Her face was strangely pale: her eyes heavy in the black circles round them. She came up to the table very slowly, and leant her hand upon it, saying mournfully—

"Father, you must not blame Paul. I could not help hearing a great deal of what you were saying. He did tell me, and perhaps it would have been wiser not, dear Paul! But—oh, dear! oh, dear! I am so sick with shame! He told me out of his kind heart, because he saw—that I was so very unhappy at *his* going away."

She hung her head, and leant more heavily than before on her supporting hand.

"I don't understand," said her father; but he was beginning to understand. Phillis did not answer till he asked her again. I could have struck him now for his cruelty; but then I knew all.

"I loved him, father!" she said at length, raising her eyes to the minister's face.

"Had he ever spoken of love to you? Paul says not!"

"Never." She let fall her eyes, and drooped more than ever. I almost thought she would fall.

"I could not have believed it," said he, in a hard voice, yet sighing the moment he had spoken. A dead silence for a moment. "Paul! I was unjust to you. You deserved blame, but not all that I said." Then again a silence. I thought I saw Phillis's white lips moving, but it might be the flickering of the candlelight—a moth had flown in through the open casement, and was fluttering round the flame; I might have saved it, but I did not care to do so, my heart was too full of other things. At any rate, no sound was heard for long endless minutes. Then he said—"Phillis! did we not make you happy here? Have we not loved you enough?"

She did not seem to understand the drift of this question; she looked up as if bewildered, and her beautiful eyes dilated with a

painful, tortured expression. He went on without noticing the look on her face ; he did not see it, I am sure.

“ And yet you would have left us, left your home, left your father and your mother, and gone away with this stranger, wandering over the world.”

He suffered, too ; there were tones of pain in the voice in which he uttered this reproach. Probably the father and daughter were never so far apart in their lives, so unsympathetic. Yet some new terror came over her, and it was to him she turned for help. A shadow came over her face, and she tottered towards her father ; falling down, her arms across his knees, and moaning out—

“ Father, my head ! my head ! ” and then she slipped through his quick-enfolding arms, and lay on the ground at his feet.

I shall never forget his sudden look of agony while I live ; never ! We raised her up ; her colour had strangely darkened ; she was insensible. I ran through the back-kitchen to the yard pump, and brought back water. The minister had her on his knees, her head against his breast, almost as though she were a sleeping child. He was trying to rise up with his poor precious burden, but the momentary terror had robbed the strong man of his strength, and he sank back in his chair with sobbing breath.

“ She is not dead, Paul ! is she ? ” he whispered, hoarse, as I came near him.

I, too, could not speak, but I pointed to the quivering of the muscles round her mouth. Just then cousin Holman, attracted by some unwonted sound, came down. I remember I was surprised at the time at her presence of mind, she seemed to know so much better what to do than the minister, in the midst of the sick affright which blanched her countenance, and made her tremble all over. I think now that it was the recollection of what had gone before ; the miserable thought that possibly his words had brought on this attack, whatever it might be, that so unmanned the minister. We carried her upstairs, and while the women were putting her to bed, still unconscious, still slightly convulsed, I slipped out, and saddled one of the horses, and rode as fast as the heavy-trotting beast could go, to Hornby, to find the doctor there, and bring him back. He was out, might be detained the whole night. I remember saying, “ God help us all ! ” as I sate on my horse, under the window, through which

the apprentice's head had appeared to answer my furious tugs at the night-bell. He was a good-natured fellow. He said—

"He may be home in half-an-hour, there's no knowing; but I dare say he will. I'll send him out to the Hope Farm directly he comes in. It's that good-looking young woman, Holman's daughter, that's ill, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"It would be a pity if she was to go. She's an only child, isn't she? I'll get up, and smoke a pipe in the surgery, ready for the governor's coming home. I might go to sleep if I went to bed again."

"Thank you, you're a good fellow!" and I rode back almost as quickly as I came.

It was a brain fever. The doctor said so, when he came in the early summer morning. I believe we had come to know the nature of the illness in the night-watches that had gone before. As to hope of ultimate recovery, or even evil prophecy of the probable end, the cautious doctor would be entrapped into neither. He gave his directions, and promised to come again; so soon, that this one thing showed his opinion of the gravity of the case.

By God's mercy she recovered, but it was a long, weary time first. According to previously made plans, I was to have gone home at the beginning of August. But all such ideas were put aside now, without a word being spoken. I really think that I was necessary in the house, and especially necessary to the minister at this time; my father was the last man in the world, under such circumstances, to expect me home.

I say I think I was necessary in the house. Every person (I had almost said every creature, for all the dumb beasts seemed to know and love Phillis) about the place went grieving and sad, as though a cloud was over the sun. They did their work, each striving to steer clear of the temptation to eye-service, in fulfilment of the trust reposed in them by the minister. For the day after Phillis had been taken ill, he had called all the men employed on the farm into the empty barn; and there he had entreated their prayers for his only child; and then and there he had told them of his present incapacity for thought about any other thing in this world but his little daughter, lying nigh unto death, and he had asked them to go on with their daily labours as best they could, without his direction. So, as I say, these honest men did

their work to the best of their ability, but they slouched along with sad and careful faces, coming one by one in the dim mornings to ask news of the sorrow that overshadowed the house; and receiving Betty's intelligence, always rather darkened by passing through her mind, with slow shakes of the head, and a dull wistfulness of sympathy. But, poor fellows, they were hardly fit to be trusted with hasty messages, and here my poor services came in. One time I was to ride hard to Sir William Bentinck's, and petition for ice out of his ice-house, to put on Phillis's head. Another it was to Eltham I must go, by train, horse, anyhow, and bid the doctor there come for a consultation, for fresh symptoms had appeared, which Mr. Brown, of Hornby, considered unfavourable. Many an hour have I sate on the window-seat, half way up the stairs, close by the old clock, listening in the hot stillness of the house for the sounds in the sick-room. The minister and I met often, but spoke together seldom. He looked so old—so old! He shared the nursing with his wife; the strength that was needed seemed to be given to them both in that day. They required no one else about their child. Every office about her was sacred to them; even Betty only went into the room for the most necessary purposes. Once I saw Phillis through the open door; her pretty golden hair had been cut off long before; her head was covered with wet cloths, and she was moving it backwards and forwards on the pillow, with weary, never-ending motion, her poor eyes shut, trying in the old accustomed way to croon out a hymn tune, but perpetually breaking it up into moans of pain. Her mother sate by her, tearless, changing the cloths upon her head with patient solicitude. I did not see the minister at first, but there he was in a dark corner, down upon his knees, his hands clasped together in passionate prayer. Then the door shut, and I saw no more.

One day he was wanted; and I had to summon him. Brother Robinson and another minister, hearing of his "trial," had come to see him. I told him this upon the stair-landing in a whisper. He was strangely troubled.

"They will want me to lay bare my heart. I cannot do it. Paul, stay with me. They mean well; but as for spiritual help at such a time—it is God only, God only, who can give it."

So I went in with him. They were two ministers from the neighbourhood; both older than Ebenezer Holman; but evi-

dently inferior to him in education and worldly position. I thought they looked at me as if I were an intruder, but remembering the minister's words I held my ground, and took up one of poor Phillis's books (of which I could not read a word) to have an ostensible occupation. Presently I was asked to "engage in prayer," and we all knelt down; Brother Robinson "leading," and quoting largely, as I remember, from the Book of Job. He seemed to take for his text, if texts are ever taken for prayers, "Behold, thou hast instructed many; but now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest, it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled." When we others rose up, the minister continued for some minutes on his knees. Then he too got up, and stood facing us, for a moment, before we all sate down in conclave. After a pause Robinson began—

"We grieve for you, Brother Holman, for your trouble is great. But we would fain have you remember you are as a light set on a hill; and the congregations are looking at you with watchful eyes. We have been talking as we came along on the two duties required of you in this strait; Brother Hodgson and me. And we have resolved to exhort you on these two points. First, God has given you the opportunity of showing forth an example of resignation." Poor Mr. Holman visibly winced at this word. I could fancy how he had tossed aside such brotherly preachings in his happier moments; but now his whole system was unstrung, and "resignation" seemed a term which presupposed that the dreaded misery of losing Phillis was inevitable. But good, stupid Mr. Robinson went on. "We hear on all sides that there are scarce any hopes of your child's recovery; and it may be well to bring you to mind of Abraham; and how he was willing to kill his only child when the Lord commanded. Take example by him, Brother Holman. Let us hear you say, 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!'"

There was a pause of expectancy. I verily believe the minister tried to feel it; but he could not. Heart of flesh was too strong. Heart of stone he had not.

"I will say it to my God, when He gives me strength—when the day comes," he spoke at last.

The other two looked at each other, and shook their heads. I think the reluctance to answer as they wished was not quite unexpected. The minister went on: "There are hopes yet,"

he said, as if to himself. "God has given me a great heart for hoping, and I will not look forward beyond the hour." Then turning more to them, and speaking louder, he added: "Brethren, God will strengthen me when the time comes, when such resignation as you speak of is needed. Till then I cannot feel it; and what I do not feel I will not express; using words as if they were a charm." He was getting chafed, I could see.

He had rather put them out by these speeches of his; but after a short time, and some more shakes of the head, Robinson began again—

"Secondly, we would have you listen to the voice of the rod, and ask yourself for what sins this trial has been laid upon you; whether you may not have been too much given up to your farm and your cattle; whether this world's learning has not puffed you up to vain conceit and neglect of the things of God; whether you have not made an idol of your daughter?"

"I cannot answer—I will not answer!" exclaimed the minister. "My sins I confess to God. But if they were scarlet (and they are so in His sight," he added humbly), "I hold with Christ that afflictions are not sent by God in wrath as penalties for sin."

"Is that orthodox, Brother Robinson?" asked the third minister, in a deferential tone of inquiry.

Despite the minister's injunction not to leave him, I thought matters were getting so serious that a little homely interruption would be more to the purpose than my continued presence, and I went round to the kitchen to ask for Betty's help.

"'Od rot 'em!" said she; "they're always a-coming at illconvenient times; and they have such hearty appetites, they'll make nothing of what would have served master and you since our poor lass has been ill. I've but a bit of cold beef in th' house; but I'll do some ham and eggs, and that 'll rout 'em from worrying the minister. They're a deal quieter after they've had their victual. Last time as old Robinson came, he was very reprehensible upon master's learning, which he couldn't compass to save his life, so he needn't have been afeared of that temptation, and used words long enough to have knocked a body down; but after me and missus had given him his fill of victual, and he'd had some good ale and a pipe, he spoke just like any other man, and could crack a joke with me."

Their visit was the only break in the long weary days and

nights. I do not mean that no other inquiries were made. I believe that all the neighbours hung about the place daily till they could learn from some out-comer how Phillis Holman was. But they knew better than to come up to the house, for the August weather was so hot that every door and window was kept constantly open, and the least sound outside penetrated all through. I am sure the cocks and hens had a sad time of it; for Betty drove them all into an empty barn, and kept them fastened up in the dark for several days, with very little effect as regarded their crowing and clacking. At length came a sleep which was the crisis, and from which she awakened up with a new faint life. Her slumber had lasted many, many hours. We scarcely dared to breathe or move during the time; we had striven to hope so long, that we were sick at heart, and durst not trust in the favourable signs: the even breathing, the moistened skin, the slight return of delicate colour into the pale, wan lips. I recollect stealing out that evening in the dusk, and wandering down the grassy lane, under the shadow of the over-arching elms to the little bridge at the foot of the hill, where the lane to the Hope Farm joined another road to Hornby. On the low parapet of that bridge I found Timothy Cooper, the stupid, half-witted labourer, sitting, idly throwing bits of mortar into the brook below. He just looked up at me as I came near, but gave me no greeting, either by word or gesture. He had generally made some sign of recognition to me, but this time I thought he was sullen at being dismissed. Nevertheless I felt as if it would be a relief to talk a little to some one, and I sate down by him. While I was thinking how to begin, he yawned wearily.

"You are tired, Tim," said I.

"Ay," said he. "But I reckon I may go home now."

"Have you been sitting here long?"

"Welly all day long. Leastways sin' seven i' th' morning.

"Why, what in the world have you been doing?"

"Nought."

"Why have you been sitting here, then?"

"T' keep carts off." He was up now, stretching himself, and shaking his lubberly limbs.

"Carts! what carts?"

"Carts as might ha' wakened yon wench! It's Hornby market-day. I reckon yo're no better nor a half-wit yourself." He cocked his eye at me as if he were gauging my intellect.

"And have you been sitting here all day to keep the lane quiet?"

"Ay. I've nought else to do. Th' minister has turned me adrift. Have yo' heard how th' lass is faring to-night?"

"They hope she'll waken better for this long sleep. Good-night to you, and God bless you, Timothy," said I.

He scarcely took any notice of my words, as he lumbered across a stile that led to his cottage. Presently I went home to the farm. Phillis had stirred, had spoken two or three faint words. Her mother was with her, dropping nourishment into her scarce conscious mouth. The rest of the household were summoned to evening prayer for the first time for many days. It was a return to the daily habits of happiness and health. But in these silent days our very lives had been an unspoken prayer. Now we met in the house-place, and looked at each other with strange recognition of the thankfulness on all our faces. We knelt down; we waited for the minister's voice. He did not begin as usual. He could not; he was choking. Presently we heard the strong man's sob. Then old John turned round on his knees, and said—

"Minister, I reckon we have blessed the Lord wi' all our souls, though we've ne'er talked about it; and maybe He'll not need spoken words this night. God bless us all, and keep our Phillis safe from harm! Amen."

Old John's impromptu prayer was all we had that night.

"Our Phillis," as he had called her, grew better day by day from that time. Not quickly; I sometimes grew desponding, and feared that she would never be what she had been before; no more she has, in some ways.

I seized an early opportunity to tell the minister about Timothy Cooper's unsolicited watch on the bridge during the long summer's day.

"God forgive me!" said the minister. "I have been too proud in my own conceit. The first steps I take out of this house shall be to Cooper's cottage."

I need hardly say Timothy was reinstated in his place on the farm; and I have often since admired the patience with which his master tried to teach him how to do the easy work which was henceforward carefully adjusted to his capacity.

Phillis was carried downstairs, and lay for hour after hour quite silent on the great sofa, drawn up under the windows of

the house-place. She seemed always the same, gentle, quiet, and sad. Her energy did not return with her bodily strength. It was sometimes pitiful to see her parents' vain endeavours to rouse her to interest. One day the minister brought her a set of blue ribbons, reminding her with a tender smile of a former conversation in which she had owned to a love of such feminine vanities. She spoke gratefully to him, but when he was gone she laid them on one side, and languidly shut her eyes. Another time I saw her mother bring her the Latin and Italian books that she had been so fond of before her illness—or, rather, before Holdsworth had gone away. That was worst of all. She turned her face to the wall, and cried as soon as her mother's back was turned. Betty was laying the cloth for the early dinner. Her sharp eyes saw the state of the case.

"Now, Phillis!" said she, coming up to the sofa; "we ha' done a' we can for you, and th' doctors has done a' they can for you, and I think the Lord has done a' He can for you, and more than you deserve, too, if you don't do something for yourself. If I were you, I'd rise up and snuff the moon, sooner than break your father's and your mother's hearts wi' watching and waiting till it pleases you to fight your own way back to cheerfulness. There, I never favoured long preachings, and I've said my say."

A day or two after Phillis asked me, when we were alone, if I thought my father and mother would allow her to go and stay with them for a couple of months. She blushed a little as she faltered out her wish for change of thought and scene.

"Only for a short time, Paul. Then—we will go back to the peace of the old days. I know we shall; I can, and I will!"

THE GREY WOMAN.

PORTION I.

THERE is a mill by the Neckar-side, to which many people resort for coffee, according to the fashion which is almost national in Germany. There is nothing particularly attractive in the situation of this mill; it is on the Mannheim (the flat and unromantic) side of Heidelberg. The river turns the mill-wheel with a plenteous gushing sound; the out-buildings and the dwelling-house of the miller form a well-kept dusty quadrangle. Again, further from the river there is a garden full of willows, and arbours, and flower-beds not well kept, but very profuse in flowers and luxuriant creepers, knotting and looping the arbours together. In each of these arbours is a stationary table of white painted wood, and light movable chairs of the same colour and material.

I went to drink coffee there with some friends in 184—. The stately old miller came out to greet us, as some of the party were known to him of old. He was of a grand build of a man, and his loud musical voice, with its tone friendly and familiar, his rolling laugh of welcome, went well with the keen bright eye, the fine cloth of his coat, and the general look of substance about the place. Poultry of all kinds abounded in the mill-yard, where there were ample means of livelihood for them strewed on the ground; but not content with this, the miller took out handfuls of corn from the sacks, and threw liberally to the cocks and hens that ran almost under his feet in their eagerness. And all the time he was doing this, as it were habitually, he was talking to us, and ever and anon calling to his daughter and the serving-maids, to bid them hasten the coffee we had ordered. He followed us to an arbour, and saw us served to his satisfaction with the best of everything we could ask for; and then left us to go round to the different arbours and see that each party was

properly attended to ; and, as he went, this great, prosperous, happy-looking man whistled softly one of the most plaintive airs I ever heard.

“ His family have held this mill ever since the old Palatinate days ; or rather, I should say, have possessed the ground ever since then, for two successive mills of theirs have been burnt down by the French. If you want to see Scherer in a passion, just talk to him of the possibility of a French invasion.”

But at this moment, still whistling that mournful air, we saw the miller going down the steps that led from the somewhat raised garden into the mill-yard ; and so I seemed to have lost my chance of putting him in a passion.

We had nearly finished our coffee, and our “ kucken,” and our cinnamon cake, when heavy splashes fell on our thick leafy covering ; quicker and quicker they came, coming through the tender leaves as if they were tearing them asunder ; all the people in the garden were hurrying under shelter, or seeking for their carriages standing outside. Up the steps the miller came hastening, with a crimson umbrella, fit to cover every one left in the garden, and followed by his daughter, and one or two maidens, each bearing an umbrella.

“ Come into the house—come in, I say. It is a summer-storm, and will flood the place for an hour or two, till the river carries it away. Here, here.”

And we followed him back into his own house. We went into the kitchen first. Such an array of bright copper and tin vessels I never saw ; and all the wooden things were as thoroughly scoured. The red tile floor was spotless when we went in, but in two minutes it was all over slop and dirt with the tread of many feet ; for the kitchen was filled, and still the worthy miller kept bringing in more people under his great crimson umbrella. He even called the dogs in, and made them lie down under the tables.

His daughter said something to him in German, and he shook his head merrily at her. Everybody laughed.

“ What did she say ? ” I asked.

“ She told him to bring the ducks in next ; but indeed if more people come we shall be suffocated. What with the thundery weather, and the stove, and all these steaming clothes, I really think we must ask leave to pass on. Perhaps we might go in and see Frau Scherer.”

My friend asked the daughter of the house for permission to go into an inner chamber and see her mother. It was granted, and we went into a sort of saloon, overlooking the Neckar; very small, very bright, and very close. The floor was slippery with polish; long narrow pieces of looking-glass against the walls reflected the perpetual motion of the river opposite; a white porcelain stove, with some old-fashioned ornaments of brass about it; a sofa, covered with Utrecht velvet, a table before it, and a piece of worsted-worked carpet under it; a vase of artificial flowers; and, lastly, an alcove with a bed in it, on which lay the paralysed wife of the good miller, knitting busily, formed the furniture. I spoke as if this was all that was to be seen in the room; but, sitting quietly, while my friend kept up a brisk conversation in a language which I but half understood, my eye was caught by a picture in a dark corner of the room, and I got up to examine it more nearly.

It was that of a young girl of extreme beauty: evidently of middle rank. There was a sensitive refinement in her face, as if she almost shrank from the gaze which, of necessity, the painter must have fixed upon her. It was not over-well painted, but I felt that it must have been a good likeness, from this strong impress of peculiar character which I have tried to describe. From the dress, I should guess it to have been painted in the latter half of the last century. And I afterwards heard that I was right.

There was a little pause in the conversation.

"Will you ask Frau Scherer who this is?"

My friend repeated my question, and received a long reply in German. Then she turned round and translated it to me.

"It is the likeness of a great-aunt of her husband's." (My friend was standing by me, and looking at the picture with sympathetic curiosity.) "See! here is the name on the open page of this Bible, 'Anna Scherer, 1778.' Frau Scherer says there is a tradition in the family that this pretty girl, with her complexion of lilies and roses, lost her colour so entirely through fright, that she was known by the name of the Grey Woman. She speaks as if this Anna Scherer lived in some state of life-long terror. But she does not know details; refers me to her husband for them. She thinks he has some papers which were written by the original of that picture for her daughter, who died in this very house not long after our friend there was

married. We can ask Herr Scherer for the whole story if you like."

"Oh yes, pray do!" said I. And, as our host came in at this moment to ask how we were faring, and to tell us that he had sent to Heidelberg for carriages to convey us home, seeing no chance of the heavy rain abating, my friend, after thanking him, passed on to my request.

"Ah!" said he, his face changing, "the aunt Anna had a sad history. It was all owing to one of those hellish Frenchmen; and her daughter suffered for it—the cousin Ursula, as we all called her when I was a child. To be sure, the good cousin Ursula was his child as well. The sins of the fathers are visited on their children. The lady would like to know all about it, would she? Well, there are papers—a kind of apology the aunt Anna wrote for putting an end to her daughter's engagement—or rather facts which she revealed, that prevented cousin Ursula from marrying the man she loved; and so she would never have any other good fellow, else I have heard say my father would have been thankful to have made her his wife." All this time he was rummaging in the drawer of an old-fashioned bureau, and now he turned round, with a bundle of yellow MSS. in his hand, which he gave to my friend, saying, "Take it home, take it home, and if you care to make out our crabbed German writing, you may keep it as long as you like. and read it at your leisure. Only I must have it back again when you have done with it, that's all."

And so we became possessed of the manuscript of the following letter, which it was our employment, during many a long evening that ensuing winter, to translate, and in some parts to abbreviate. The letter began with some reference to the pain which she had already inflicted upon her daughter by some unexplained opposition to a project of marriage; but I doubt if, without the clue with which the good miller had furnished us, we could have made out even this much from the passionate, broken sentences that made us fancy that some scene between the mother and daughter—and possibly a third person—had occurred just before the mother had begun to write.

"Thou dost not love thy child, mother! Thou dost not care if her heart is broken!" Ah, God! and these words of my heart-beloved Ursula ring in my ears as if the sound of them

would fill them when I lie a-dying. And her poor tear-stained face comes between me and everything else. Child! hearts do not break; life is very tough as well as very terrible. But I will not decide for thee. I will tell all; and thou shalt bear the burden of choice. I may be wrong; I have little wit left, and never had much, I think; but an instinct serves me in place of judgment, and that instinct tells me that thou and thy Henri must never be married. Yet I may be in error. I would fain make my child happy. Lay this paper before the good priest Schriesheim; if, after reading it, thou hast doubts which make thee uncertain. Only I will tell thee all now, on condition that no spoken word ever passes between us on the subject. It would kill me to be questioned. I should have to see all present again.

My father held, as thou knowest, the mill on the Neckar, where thy new-found uncle, Scherer, now lives. Thou rememberest the surprise with which we were received there last vintage twelvemonth. How thy uncle disbelieved me when I said that I was his sister Anna, whom he had long believed to be dead, and how I had to lead thee underneath the picture, painted of me long ago, and point out, feature by feature, the likeness between it and thee; and how, as I spoke, I recalled first to my own mind, and then by speech to his, the details of the time when it was painted; the merry words that passed between us then, a happy boy and girl; the position of the articles of furniture in the room; our father's habits; the cherry-tree, now cut down, that shaded the window of my bedroom, through which my brother was wont to squeeze himself, in order to spring on to the topmost bough that would bear his weight; and thence would pass me back his cap laden with fruit to where I sat on the window-sill, too sick with fright for him to care much for eating the cherries.

And at length Fritz gave way, and believed me to be his sister Anna, even as though I were risen from the dead. And thou rememberest how he fetched in his wife, and told her that I was not dead, but was come back to the old home once more, changed as I was. And she would scarce believe him, and scanned me with a cold, distrustful eye, till at length—for I knew her of old as Babette Müller—I said that I was well-to-do, and needed not to seek out friends for what they had to give. And then she asked—not me, but her husband—why I had kept silent so long, leading

all—father, brother, every one that loved me in my own dear home—to esteem me dead. And then thine uncle (thou rememberest?) said he cared not to know more than I cared to tell; that I was his Anna, found again, to be a blessing to him in his old age, as I had been in his boyhood. I thanked him in my heart for his trust; for were the need for telling all less than it seems to me now I could not speak of my past life. But she, who was my sister-in-law still, held back her welcome, and, for want of that, I did not go to live in Heidelberg as I had planned beforehand, in order to be near my brother Fritz, but contented myself with his promise to be a father to my Ursula when I should die and leave this weary world.

That Babette Müller was, as I may say, the cause of all my life's suffering. She was a baker's daughter in Heidelberg—a great beauty, as people said, and, indeed, as I could see for myself. I, too—thou sawest my picture—was reckoned a beauty, and I believe I was so. Babette Müller looked upon me as a rival. She liked to be admired, and had no one much to love her. I had several people to love me—thy grandfather, Fritz, the old servant Kätchen, Karl, the head apprentice at the mill—and I feared admiration and notice, and the being stared at as the "Schöne Müllerin," whenever I went to make my purchases in Heidelberg.

Those were happy, peaceful days. I had Kätchen to help me in the housework, and whatever we did pleased my brave old father, who was always gentle and indulgent towards us women, though he was stern enough with the apprentices in the mill. Karl, the oldest of these, was his favourite; and I can see now that my father wished him to marry me, and that Karl himself was desirous to do so. But Karl was rough-spoken, and passionate—not with me, but with the others—and I shrank from him in a way which, I fear, gave him pain. And then came thy uncle Fritz's marriage; and Babette was brought to the mill to be its mistress. Not that I cared much for giving up my post, for, in spite of my father's great kindness, I always feared that I did not manage well for so large a family (with the men, and a girl under Kätchen, we sat down eleven each night to supper). But when Babette began to find fault with Kätchen, I was unhappy at the blame that fell on faithful servants; and by-and-by I began to see that Babette was egging on Karl to make more open love to me, and, as she once said, to get done with it, and take me off to a home of my

own. My father was growing old, and did not perceive all my daily discomfort. The more Karl advanced, the more I disliked him. He was good in the main, but I had no notion of being married, and could not bear any one who talked to me about it.

Things were in this way when I had an invitation to go to Carlsruhe to visit a schoolfellow, of whom I had been very fond. Babette was all for my going; I don't think I wanted to leave home, and yet I had been very fond of Sophie Rupprecht. But I was always shy among strangers. Somehow the affair was settled for me, but not until both Fritz and my father had made inquiries as to the character and position of the Rupprechts. They learned that the father had held some kind of inferior position about the Grand-duke's court, and was now dead, leaving a widow, a noble lady, and two daughters, the elder of whom was Sophie, my friend. Madame Rupprecht was not rich, but more than respectable—genteel. When this was ascertained, my father made no opposition to my going; Babette forwarded it by all the means in her power, and even my dear Fritz had his word to say in its favour. Only Kätchen was against it—Kätchen and Karl. The opposition of Karl did more to send me to Carlsruhe than anything. For I could have objected to go; but when he took upon himself to ask what was the good of going a-gadding, visiting strangers of whom no one knew anything, I yielded to circumstances—to the pulling of Sophie and the pushing of Babette. I was silently vexed, I remember, at Babette's inspection of my clothes; at the way in which she settled that this gown was too old-fashioned, or that too common, to go with me on my visit to a noble lady; and at the way in which she took upon herself to spend the money my father had given me to buy what was requisite for the occasion. And yet I blamed myself, for every one else thought her so kind for doing all this; and she herself meant kindly, too.

At last I quitted the mill by the Neckar-side. It was a long day's journey, and Fritz went with me to Carlsruhe. The Rupprechts lived on the third floor of a house a little behind one of the principal streets, in a cramped-up court, to which we gained admittance through a doorway in the street. I remember how pinched their rooms looked after the large space we had at the mill, and yet they had an air of grandeur about them which was new to me, and which gave me pleasure, faded as some of it was. Madame Rupprecht was too formal a lady for me; I was never at

my ease with her ; but Sophie was all that I had recollected her at school—kind, affectionate, and only rather too ready with her expressions of admiration and regard. The little sister kept out of our way ; and that was all we needed, in the first enthusiastic renewal of our early friendship. The one great object of Madame Rupprecht's life was to retain her position in society ; and as her means were much diminished since her husband's death, there was not much comfort, though there was a great deal of show, in their way of living ; just the opposite of what it was at my father's house. I believe that my coming was not too much desired by Madame Rupprecht, as I brought with me another mouth to be fed ; but Sophie had spent a year or more in entreating for permission to invite me, and her mother, having once consented, was too well-bred not to give me a stately welcome.

The life in Carlsruhe was very different from what it was at home. The hours were later, the coffee was weaker in the morning, the pottage was weaker, the boiled beef less relieved by other diet, the dresses finer, the evening engagements constant. I did not find these visits pleasant. We might not knit, which would have relieved the tedium a little ; but we sat in a circle, talking together, only interrupted occasionally by a gentleman, who, breaking out of the knot of men who stood near the door, talking eagerly together, stole across the room on tiptoe, his hat under his arm, and bringing his feet together in the position we call the first at the dancing-school, made a low bow to the lady he was going to address. The first time I saw these manners I could not help smiling ; but Madame Rupprecht saw me, and spoke to me next morning rather severely, telling me that, of course, in my country breeding I could have seen nothing of court manners, or French fashions, but that that was no reason for my laughing at them. Of course I tried never to smile again in company. This visit to Carlsruhe took place in '89, just when every one was full of the events taking place at Paris ; and yet at Carlsruhe French fashions were more talked of than French politics. Madame Rupprecht, especially, thought a great deal of all French people. And this again was quite different to us at home. Fritz could hardly bear the name of a Frenchman ; and it had nearly been an obstacle to my visit to Sophie that her mother preferred being called Madame to her proper title of Frau.

One night I was sitting next to Sophie, and longing for the time when we might have supper and go home, so as to be able

to speak together, a thing forbidden by Madame Rupprecht's rules of etiquette, which strictly prohibited any but the most necessary conversation passing between members of the same family when in society. I was sitting, I say, scarcely keeping back my inclination to yawn, when two gentlemen came in, one of whom was evidently a stranger to the whole party, from the formal manner in which the host led him up, and presented him to the hostess. I thought I had never seen any one so handsome or so elegant. His hair was powdered, of course, but one could see from his complexion that it was fair in its natural state. His features were as delicate as a girl's, and set off by two little "mouches," as we called patches in those days, one at the left corner of his mouth, the other prolonging, as it were, the right eye. His dress was blue and silver. I was so lost in admiration of this beautiful young man, that I was as much surprised as if the angel Gabriel had spoken to me, when the lady of the house brought him forward to present him to me. She called him Monsieur de la Tourelle, and he began to speak to me in French; but though I understood him perfectly, I dared not trust myself to reply to him in that language. Then he tried German, speaking it with a kind of soft lisp that I thought charming. But, before the end of the evening, I became a little tired of the affected softness and effeminacy of his manners, and the exaggerated compliments he paid me, which had the effect of making all the company turn round and look at me. Madame Rupprecht was, however, pleased with the precise thing that displeased me. She liked either Sophie or me to create a sensation; of course she would have preferred that it should have been her daughter, but her daughter's friend was next best. As we went away, I heard Madame Rupprecht and Monsieur de la Tourelle reciprocating civil speeches with might and main, from which I found out that the French gentleman was coming to call on us the next day. I do not know whether I was more glad or frightened, for I had been kept upon stilts of good manners all the evening. But still I was flattered when Madame Rupprecht spoke as if she had invited him because he had shown pleasure in my society, and even more gratified by Sophie's ungrudging delight at the evident interest I had excited in so fine and agreeable a gentleman. Yet, with all this, they had hard work to keep me from running out of the salon the next day, when we heard his voice inquiring at the gate on the stairs for Madame Rupprecht. They had made

in a delicate, complimentary way by Monsieur de la Tourelle. One day I said to my father that I did not want to be married, that I would rather go back to the dear old mill; but he seemed to feel this speech of mine as dereliction of duty as great as if I had committed perjury; as if, after the ceremony of betrothal, no one had any right over me but my future husband. And yet he asked me some solemn questions; but my answers were not such as to do me any good.

“Dost thou know any fault or crime in this man that should prevent God’s blessing from resting on thy marriage with him? Dost thou feel aversion or repugnance to him in any way?”

And to all this what could I say? I could only stammer out that I did not think I loved him enough; and my poor old father saw in this reluctance only the fancy of a silly girl who did not know her own mind, but who had now gone too far to recede.

So we were married, in the Court chapel, a privilege which Madame Rupprecht had used no end of efforts to obtain for us, and which she must have thought was to secure us all possible happiness, both at the time and in recollection afterwards.

We were married; and after two days spent in festivity at Carlsruhe, among all our new fashionable friends there, I bade good-bye for ever to my dear old father. I had begged my husband to take me by way of Heidelberg to his old castle in the Vosges; but I found an amount of determination, under that effeminate appearance and manner, for which I was not prepared, and he refused my first request so decidedly that I dared not urge it. “Henceforth, Anna,” said he, “you will move in a different sphere of life; and though it is possible that you may have the power of showing favour to your relations from time to time, yet much or familiar intercourse will be undesirable, and is what I cannot allow.” I felt almost afraid, after this formal speech, of asking my father and Fritz to come and see me; but, when the agony of bidding them farewell overcame all my prudence, I did beg them to pay me a visit ere long. But they shook their heads, and spoke of business at home, of different kinds of life, of my being a Frenchwoman now. Only my father broke out at last with a blessing, and said, “If my child is unhappy—which God forbid—let her remember that her father’s house is ever open to her.” I was on the point of crying out, “Oh! take me back then now, my

father ! oh, my father !" when I felt, rather than saw, my husband present near me. He looked on with a slightly contemptuous air ; and, taking my hand in his, he led me weeping away, saying that short farewells were always the best when they were inevitable.

It took us two days to reach his château in the Vosges, for the roads were bad and the way difficult to ascertain. Nothing could be more devoted than he was all the time of the journey. It seemed as if he were trying in every way to make up for the separation which every hour made me feel the more complete between my present and my former life. I seemed as if I were only now waking up to a full sense of what marriage was, and I dare say I was not a cheerful companion on the tedious journey. At length, jealousy of my regret for my father and brother got the better of M. de la Tourelle, and he became so much displeased with me that I thought my heart would break with the sense of desolation. So it was in no cheerful frame of mind that we approached Les Rochers, and I thought that perhaps it was because I was so unhappy that the place looked so dreary. On one side, the château looked like a raw new building, hastily run up for some immediate purpose, without any growth of trees or underwood near it, only the remains of the stone used for building, not yet cleared away from the immediate neighbourhood, although weeds and lichens had been suffered to grow near and over the heaps of rubbish ; on the other, were the great rocks from which the place took its name, and rising close against them, as if almost a natural formation, was the old castle, whose building dated many centuries back.

It was not large nor grand, but it was strong and picturesque, and I used to wish that we lived in it rather than in the smart, half-furnished apartment in the new edifice, which had been hastily got ready for my reception. Incongruous as the two parts were, they were joined into a whole by means of intricate passages and unexpected doors, the exact positions of which I never fully understood. M. de la Tourelle led me to a suite of rooms set apart for me, and formally installed me in them, as in a domain of which I was sovereign. He apologised for the hasty preparation which was all he had been able to make for me, but promised, before I asked, or even thought of complaining, that they should be made as luxurious as heart could wish before many weeks had elapsed. But when, in the gloom of an autumnal evening, I

caught my own face and figure reflected in all the mirrors, which showed only a mysterious background in the dim light of the many candles which failed to illuminate the great proportions of the half-furnished salon, I clung to M. de la Tourelle, and begged to be taken to the rooms he had occupied before his marriage, he seemed angry with me, although he affected to laugh, and so decidedly put aside the notion of my having any other rooms but these, that I trembled in silence at the fantastic figures and shapes which my imagination called up as peopling the background of those gloomy mirrors. There was my boudoir, a little less dreary—my bedroom, with its grand and tarnished furniture, which I commonly made into my sitting-room, locking up the various doors which led into the boudoir, the salon, the passages—all but one through which M. de la Tourelle always entered from his own apartments in the older part of the castle. But this preference of mine for occupying my bedroom annoyed M. de la Tourelle, I am sure, though he did not care to express his displeasure. He would always allure me back into the salon, which I disliked more and more from its complete separation from the rest of the building by the long passage into which all the doors of my apartment opened. This passage was closed by heavy doors and portières through which I could not hear a sound from the other parts of the house, and, of course, the servants could not hear any movement or cry of mine unless expressly summoned. To a girl brought up as I had been in a household where every individual lived all day in the sight of every other member of the family, never wanted either cheerful words or the sense of silent companionship, this grand isolation of mine was very formidable; and the more so, because M. de la Tourelle, as landed proprietor, sportsman, and what not, was generally out of doors the greater part of every day, and sometimes for two or three days at a time. I had no pride to keep me from associating with the domestics; it would have been natural to me in many ways to have sought them out for a word of sympathy in those dreary days when I was left so entirely to myself, had they been like our kindly German servants. But I disliked them, one and all; I could not tell why. Some were civil, but there was a familiarity in their civility which repelled me; others were rude, and treated me more as if I were an intruder than their master's chosen wife; and yet of the two sets I liked these last the best.

The principal male servant belonged to this latter class. I was

very much afraid of him, he had such an air of suspicious surliness about him in all he did for me ; and yet M. de la Tourelle spoke of him as most valuable and faithful. Indeed, it sometimes struck me that Lefebvre ruled his master in some things ; and this I could not make out. For, while M. de la Tourelle behaved towards me as if I were some precious toy or idol, to be cherished, and fostered, and petted, and indulged, I soon found out how little I, or, apparently, any one else, could bend the terrible will of the man who had on first acquaintance appeared to me too effeminate and languid to exert his will in the slightest particular. I had learnt to know his face better now ; and to see that some vehement depth of feeling, the cause of which I could not fathom, made his grey eye glitter with pale light, and his lips contract, and his delicate cheek whiten on certain occasions. But all had been so open and above-board at home, that I had no experience to help me to unravel any mysteries among those who lived under the same roof. I understood that I had made what Madame Rupprecht and her set would have called a great marriage, because I lived in a château with many servants, bound ostensibly to obey me as a mistress. I understood that M. de la Tourelle was fond enough of me in his way—proud of my beauty, I dare say (for he often enough spoke about it to me)—but he was also jealous, and suspicious, and uninfluenced by my wishes, unless they tallied with his own. I felt at this time as if I could have been fond of him, too, if he would have let me ; but I was timid from my childhood, and before long my dread of his displeasure (coming down like thunder into the midst of his love, for such slight causes as a hesitation in reply, a wrong word, or a sigh for my father), conquered my humorous inclination to love one who was so handsome, so accomplished, so indulgent and devoted. But if I could not please him when indeed I loved him, you may imagine how often I did wrong when I was so much afraid of him as to quietly avoid his company for fear of his outbursts of passion. One thing I remember noticing, that the more M. de la Tourelle was displeased with me the more Lefebvre seemed to chuckle ; and when I was restored to favour, sometimes on as sudden an impulse as that which occasioned my disgrace, Lefebvre would look askance at me with his cold, malicious eyes, and once or twice at such times he spoke most disrespectfully to M. de la Tourelle.

I have almost forgotten to say that, in the early days of my life at Les Rochers, M. de la Tourelle, in contemptuous indulgent

pity at my weakness in disliking the dreary grandeur of the salon, wrote up to the milliner in Paris from whom my *corbeille de mariage* had come, to desire her to look out for me a maid of middle age, experienced in the toilette, and with so much refinement that she might on occasion serve as companion to me.

PORTION II.

A NORMAN woman, Amante by name, was sent to Les Rochers by the Paris milliner, to become my maid. She was tall and handsome, though upwards of forty, and somewhat gaunt. But, on first seeing her, I liked her; she was neither rude nor familiar in her manners, and had a pleasant look of straightforwardness about her that I had missed in all the inhabitants of the château, and had foolishly set down in my own mind as a national want. Amante was directed by M. de la Tourelle to sit in my boudoir, and to be always within call. He also gave her many instructions as to her duties in matters which, perhaps, strictly belonged to my department of management. But I was young and inexperienced, and thankful to be spared any responsibility.

I dare say it was true what M. de la Tourelle said—before many weeks had elapsed—that, for a great lady, a lady of a castle, I became sadly too familiar with my Norman waiting-maid. But you know that by birth we were not very far apart in rank, Amante was the daughter of a Norman farmer, I, of a German miller; and besides that, my life was so lonely! It almost seemed as if I could not please my husband. He had written for some one capable of being my companion at times, and now he was jealous of my free regard for her—angry because I could sometimes laugh at her original tunes and amusing proverbs, while when with him I was too much frightened to smile.

From time to time families from a distance of some leagues drove through the bad roads in their heavy carriages to pay us a visit, and there was an occasional talk of our going to Paris when public affairs should be a little more settled. These little events and plans were the only variations in my life for the first twelve months, if I except the alternations in M. de la Tourelle's temper, his unreasonable anger, and his passionate fondness.

Perhaps one of the reasons that made me take pleasure and comfort in Amante's society was, that whereas I was afraid of everybody (I do not think I was half as much afraid of things as of persons), Amante feared no one. She would quietly beard Lefebvre, and he respected her all the more for it; she had a knack of putting questions to M. de la Tourelle, which respectfully informed him that she had detected the weak point, but forbore to press him too closely upon it out of deference to his position as her master. And with all her shrewdness to others, she had quite tender ways with me; all the more so at this time because she knew, what I had not yet ventured to tell M. de la Tourelle, that by-and-by I might become a mother—that wonderful object of mysterious interest to single women, who no longer hope to enjoy such blessedness themselves.

It was once more autumn; late in October. But I was reconciled to my habitation; the walls of the new part of the building no longer looked bare and desolate; the *débris* had been so far cleared away by M. de la Tourelle's desire as to make me a little flower-garden, in which I tried to cultivate those plants that I remembered as growing at home. Amante and I had moved the furniture in the rooms, and adjusted it to our liking; my husband had ordered many an article from time to time that he thought would give me pleasure, and I was becoming tame to my apparent imprisonment in a certain part of the great building, the whole of which I had never yet explored. It was October, as I say, once more. The days were lovely, though short in duration, and M. de la Tourelle had occasion, so he said, to go to that distant estate, the superintendence of which so frequently took him away from home. He took Lefebvre with him, and possibly some more of the lacqueys; he often did. And my spirits rose a little at the thought of his absence; and then the new sensation that he was the father of my unborn babe came over me, and I tried to invest him with this fresh character. I tried to believe that it was his passionate love for me that made him so jealous and tyrannical, imposing, as he did, restrictions on my very intercourse with my dear father, from whom I was so entirely separated, as far as personal intercourse was concerned.

I had, it is true, let myself go into a sorrowful review of all the troubles which lay hidden beneath the seeming luxury of my life. I knew that no one cared for me except my husband and Amante;

for it was clear enough to see that I, as his wife, and also as a *parvenue*, was not popular among the few neighbours who surrounded us ; and as for the servants, the women were all hard and impudent-looking, treating me with a semblance of respect that had more of mockery than reality in it ; while the men had a lurking kind of fierceness about them, sometimes displayed even to M. de la Tourelle, who on his part, it must be confessed, was often severe, even to cruelty, in his management of them. My husband loved me, I said to myself, but I said it almost in the form of a question. His love was shown fitfully, and more in ways calculated to please himself than to please me. I felt that for no wish of mine would he deviate one tittle from any pre-determined course of action. I had learnt the inflexibility of those thin delicate lips ; I knew how anger would turn his fair complexion to deadly white, and bring the cruel light into his pale blue eyes. The love I bore to any one seemed to be a reason for his hating them, and so I went on pitying myself one long dreary afternoon during that absence of his of which I have spoken, only sometimes remembering to check myself in my murmurings by thinking of the new unseen link between us, and then crying afresh to think how wicked I was. Oh, how well I remember that long October evening ! Amante came in from time to time, talking away to cheer me—talking about dress and Paris, and I hardly know what, but from time to time looking at me keenly with her friendly dark eyes, and with serious interest, too, though all her words were about frivolity. At length she heaped the fire with wood, drew the heavy silken curtains close ; for I had been anxious hitherto to keep them open, so that I might see the pale moon mounting the skies, as I used to see her—the same moon—rise from behind the Kaiser Stuhl at Heidelberg ; but the sight made me cry, so Amante shut it out. She dictated to me as a nurse does to a child.

“ Now, madame must have the little kitten to keep her company,” she said, “ while I go and ask Marthon for a cup of coffee.” I remember that speech, and the way it roused me, for I did not like Amante to think I wanted amusing by a kitten. It might be my petulance, but this speech—such as she might have made to a child—annoyed me, and I said that I had reason for my lowness of spirits—meaning that they were not of so imaginary a nature that I could be diverted from them by the gambols of a kitten. So, though I did not choose to tell her all, I told her a part : and

as I spoke, I began to suspect that the good creature knew much of what I withheld, and that the little speech about the kitten was more thoughtfully kind than it had seemed at first. I said that it was so long since I had heard from my father; that he was an old man, and so many things might happen—I might never see him again—and I so seldom heard from him or my brother. It was a more complete and total separation than I had ever anticipated when I married, and something of my home and of my life previous to my marriage I told the good Amante; for I had not been brought up as a great lady, and the sympathy of any human being was precious to me.

Amante listened with interest, and in return told me some of the events and sorrows of her own life. Then, remembering her purpose, she set out in search of the coffee, which ought to have been brought to me an hour before; but, in my husband's absence, my wishes were but seldom attended to, and I never dared to give orders.

Presently she returned, bringing the coffee and a large cake.

"See!" said she, setting it down. "Look at my plunder. Madame must eat. Those who eat always laugh. And, besides, I have a little news that will please madame." Then she told me that lying on a table in the great kitchen was a bundle of letters, come by the courier from Strasburg that very afternoon: then, fresh from her conversation with me, she had hastily untied the string that bound them, but had only just traced out one that she thought was from Germany, when a servant-man came in, and, with the start he gave her, she dropped the letters, which he picked up, swearing at her for having untied and disarranged them. She told him that she believed there was a letter there for her mistress; but he only swore the more, saying, that if there was it was no business of hers, or of his either, for that he had the strictest orders always to take all letters that arrived during his master's absence into the private sitting-room of the latter—a room into which I had never entered, although it opened out of my husband's dressing-room.

I asked Amante if she had not conquered and brought me this letter. No, indeed, she replied, it was almost as much as his life was worth to live among such a set of servants: it was only a month ago that Jacques had stabbed Valentin for some jesting talk. Had I never missed Valentin—that handsome young lad

who carried up the wood into my salon? Poor fellow! he lies dead and cold now, and they said in the village he had put an end to himself, but those of the household knew better. Oh! I need not be afraid; Jacques was gone no one knew where; but with such people it was not safe to upbraid or insist. Monsieur would be at home the next day, and it would not be long to wait.

But I felt as if I could not exist till the next day without the letter. It might be to say that my father was ill, dying—he might cry for his daughter from his death-bed! In short, there was no end to the thoughts and fancies that haunted me. It was of no use for Amante to say that, after all, she might be mistaken—that she did not read writing well—that she had but a glimpse of the address; I let my coffee cool, my food all became distasteful, and I wrung my hands with impatience to get at the letter, and have some news of my dear ones at home. All the time Amante kept her imperturbable good temper, first reasoning, then scolding. At last she said, as if wearied out, that if I would consent to make a good supper, she would see what could be done as to our going to monsieur's room in search of the letter, after the servants were all gone to bed. We agreed to go together when all was still, and look over the letters; there could be no harm in that; and yet, somehow, we were such cowards we dared not do it openly and in the face of the household.

Presently my supper came up—partridges, bread, fruits, and cream. How well I remember that supper! We put the untouched cake away in a sort of buffet, and poured the cold coffee out of the window, in order that the servants might not take offence at the apparent fancifulness of sending down for food I could not eat. I was so anxious for all to be in bed, that I told the footman who served that he need not wait to take away the plates and dishes, but might go to bed. Long after I thought the house was quiet, Amante, in her caution, made me wait. It was past eleven before we set out, with cat-like steps and veiled light, along the passages, to go to my husband's room and steal my own letter, if it was indeed there; a fact about which Amante had become very uncertain in the progress of our discussion.

To make you understand my story, I must now try to explain to you the plan of the château. It had been at one time a forti-

fied place of some strength, perched on the summit of a rock, which projected from the side of the mountain. But additions had been made to the old building (which must have borne a strong resemblance to the castles overhanging the Rhine), and these new buildings were placed so as to command a magnificent view, being on the steepest side of the rock, from which the mountain fell away, as it were, leaving the great plain of France in full survey. The ground-plan was something of the shape of three sides of an oblong; my apartments in the modern edifice occupied the narrow end, and had this grand prospect. The front of the castle was old, and ran parallel to the road far below. In this were contained the offices and public rooms of various descriptions, into which I never penetrated. The back wing (considering the new building, in which my apartments were, as the centre) consisted of many rooms, of a dark and gloomy character, as the mountain-side shut out much of the sun, and heavy pine woods came down within a few yards of the windows. Yet on this side—on a projecting plateau of the rock—my husband had formed the flower-garden of which I have spoken; for he was a great cultivator of flowers in his leisure moments.

Now my bedroom was the corner room of the new buildings on the part next to the mountain. Hence I could have let myself down into the flower-garden by my hands on the window-sill on one side, without danger of hurting myself; while the windows at right angles with these looked sheer down a descent of a hundred feet at least. Going still farther along this wing, you came to the old building; in fact, these two fragments of the ancient castle had formerly been attached by some such connecting apartments as my husband had rebuilt. These rooms belonged to M. de la Tourelle. His bedroom opened into mine, his dressing-room lay beyond; and that was pretty nearly all I knew, for the servants, as well as he himself, had a knack of turning me back, under some pretence, if ever they found me walking about alone, as I was inclined to do, when first I came, from a sort of curiosity to see the whole of the place of which I found myself mistress. M. de la Tourelle never encouraged me to go out alone, either in a carriage or for a walk, saying always that the roads were unsafe in those disturbed times; indeed, I have sometimes fancied since that the flower-garden, to which the only access from the castle was through his rooms, was de-

signed in order to give me exercise and employment under his own eye.

But to return to that night. I knew, as I have said, that M. de la Tourelle's private room opened out of his dressing-room, and this out of his bedroom, which again opened into mine, the corner room. But there were other doors into all these rooms, and these doors led into a long gallery, lighted by windows, looking into the inner court. I do not remember our consulting much about it; we went through my room into my husband's apartment through the dressing-room, but the door of communication into his study was locked, so there was nothing for it but to turn back and go by the gallery to the other door. I recollect noticing one or two things in these rooms, then seen by me for the first time. I remember the sweet perfume that hung in the air, the scent bottles of silver that decked his toilet-table, and the whole apparatus for bathing and dressing, more luxurious even than those which he had provided for me. But the room itself was less splendid in its proportions than mine. In truth, the new buildings ended at the entrance to my husband's dressing-room. There were deep window recesses in walls eight or nine feet thick, and even the partitions between the chambers were three feet deep; but over all these doors or windows there fell thick, heavy draperies, so that I should think no one could have heard in one room what passed in another. We went back into my room, and out into the gallery. We had to shade our candle, from a fear that possessed us, I don't know why, lest some of the servants in the opposite wing might trace our progress towards the part of the castle unused by any one except my husband. Somehow, I had always the feeling that all the domestics, except Amante, were spies upon me, and that I was trammelled in a web of observation and unspoken limitation extending over all my actions.

There was a light in the upper room; we paused, and Amante would have again retreated, but I was chafing under the delays. What was the harm of my seeking my father's unopened letter to me in my husband's study? I, generally the coward, now blamed Amante for her unusual timidity. But the truth was, she had far more reason for suspicion as to the proceedings of that terrible household than I had ever known of. I urged her on, I pressed on myself; we came to the door, locked, but with the key in it; we turned it, we entered; the letters lay on the table, their white

oblongs catching the light in an instant, and revealing themselves to my eager eyes, hungering after the words of love from my peaceful, distant home. But just as I pressed forward to examine the letters, the candle which Amante held, caught in some draught, went out, and we were in darkness. Amante proposed that we should carry the letters back to my salon, collecting them as well as we could in the dark, and returning all but the expected one for me; but I begged her to return to my room, where I kept tinder and flint, and to strike a fresh light; and so she went, and I remained alone in the room, of which I could only just distinguish the size, and the principal articles of furniture: a large table, with a deep, overhanging cloth, in the middle, escritaires and other heavy articles against the walls; all this I could see as I stood there, my hand on the table close by the letters, my face towards the window, which, both from the darkness of the wood, growing high up the mountain-side, and the faint light of the declining moon, seemed only like an oblong of paler, purpler black than the shadowy room. How much I remembered from my one instantaneous glance before the candle went out, how much I saw as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I do not know, but even now, in my dreams, comes up that room of horror, distinct in its profound shadow. Amante could hardly have been gone a minute before I felt an additional gloom before the window, and heard soft movements outside—soft, but resolute, and continued until the end was accomplished, and the window raised.

In mortal terror of people forcing an entrance at such an hour, and in such a manner as to leave no doubt of their purpose, I would have turned to fly when first I heard the noise, only that I feared by any quick motion to catch their attention, as I also ran the danger of doing by opening the door, which was all but closed, and to whose handlings I was unaccustomed. Again, quick as lightning, I bethought me of the hiding-place between the locked door to my husband's dressing-room and the portière which covered it; but I gave that up; I felt as if I could not reach it without screaming or fainting. So I sank down softly, and crept under the table, hidden, as I hoped, by the great, deep table-cover, with its heavy fringe. I had not recovered my swooning senses fully, and was trying to reassure myself as to my being in a place of comparative safety,

for, above all things, I dreaded the betrayal of fainting, and struggled hard for such courage as I might attain by deadening myself to the danger I was in by inflicting intense pain on myself. You have often asked me the reason of that mark on my hand; it was where, in my agony, I bit out a piece of flesh with my relentless teeth, thankful for the pain, which helped to numb my terror. I say, I was but just concealed when I heard the window lifted, and one after another stepped over the sill, and stood by me so close, that I could have touched their feet. Then they laughed and whispered; my brain swam so that I could not tell the meaning of their words, but I heard my husband's laughter among the rest—low, hissing, scornful—as he kicked something heavy that they had dragged in over the floor, and which lay near me; so near, that my husband's kick, in touching it, touched me too. I don't know why—I can't tell how—but some feeling, and not curiosity, prompted me to put out my hand, ever so softly, ever so little, and feel in the darkness for what lay spurned beside me. I stole my groping palm upon the clenched and chilly hand of a corpse!

Strange to say, this roused me to instant vividness of thought. Till this moment I had almost forgotten Amante; now I planned with feverish rapidity how I could give her a warning not to return; or rather, I should say, I tried to plan, for all my projects were utterly futile, as I might have seen from the first. I could only hope she could hear the voices of those who were now busy in trying to kindle a light, swearing awful oaths at the mislaid articles which would have enabled them to strike fire. I heard her step outside coming nearer and nearer; I saw from my hiding-place the line of light beneath the door more and more distinctly; close to it her footstep paused; the men inside—at the time I thought they had been only two, but I found out afterwards there were three—paused in their endeavours, and were quite still, as breathless as myself, I suppose. Then she slowly pushed the door open with gentle motion, to save her flickering candle from being again extinguished. For a moment all was still. Then I heard my husband say, as he advanced towards her (he wore riding boots, the shape of which I knew well, as I could see them in the light)—

“Amante, may I ask what brings you here into my private room?”

He stood between her and the dead body of a man, from which ghastly heap I shrank away as it almost touched me, so close were we all together. I could not tell whether she saw it or not; I could give her no warning, nor make any dumb utterance of signs to bid her what to say—if, indeed, I knew myself what would be best for her to say.

Her voice was quite changed when she spoke; quite hoarse, and very low; yet it was steady enough as she said, what was the truth, that she had come to look for a letter which she believed had arrived for me from Germany. Good, brave Amante! Not a word about me. M. de la Tourelle answered with a grim blasphemy and a fearful threat. He would have no one prying into his premises; madame should have her letters, if there were any, when he chose to give them to her, if, indeed, he thought it well to give them to her at all. As for Amante, this was her first warning, but it was also her last; and, taking the candle out of her hand, he turned her out of the room, his companions discreetly making a screen, so as to throw the corpse into deep shadow. I heard the key turn in the door after her—if I had ever had any thought of escape it was gone now. I only hoped that whatever was to befall me might soon be over, for the tension of nerve was growing more than I could bear. The instant she could be supposed to be out of hearing, two voices began speaking in the most angry terms to my husband, upbraiding him for not having detained her, gagged her—nay, one was for killing her, saying he had seen her eye fall on the face of the dead man, whom he now kicked in his passion. Though the form of their speech was as if they were speaking to equals, yet in their tone there was something of fear. I am sure my husband was their superior, or captain, or somewhat. He replied to them almost as if he were scoffing at them, saying it was such an expenditure of labour having to do with fools; that, ten to one, the woman was only telling the simple truth, and that she was frightened enough by discovering her master in his room to be thankful to escape and return to her mistress, to whom he could easily explain on the morrow how he happened to return in the dead of night. But his companions fell to cursing me, and saying that since M. de la Tourelle had been married he was fit for nothing but to dress himself fine and scent himself with perfume; that, as for me, they could have got him twenty girls prettier, and with far more spirit in them. He quietly answered that I suited him, and that was

enough. All this time they were doing something—I could not see what—to the corpse; sometimes they were too busy rifling the dead body, I believe, to talk; again they let it fall with a heavy, resistless thud, and took to quarrelling. They taunted my husband with angry vehemence, enraged at his scoffing and scornful replies, his mocking laughter. Yes, holding up his poor dead victim, the better to strip him of whatever he wore that was valuable, I heard my husband laugh just as he had done when exchanging repartees in the little salon of the Rupprechts at Carlsruhe. I hated and dreaded him from that moment. At length, as if to make an end of the subject, he said, with cool determination in his voice—

“Now, my good friends, what is the use of all this talking, when you know in your hearts that, if I suspected my wife of knowing more than I chose of my affairs, she would not outlive the day? Remember Victorine. Because she merely joked about my affairs in an imprudent manner, and rejected my advice to keep a prudent tongue—to see what she liked, but ask nothing and say nothing—she has gone a long journey—longer than to Paris.”

“But this one is different to her; we knew all that Madame Victorine knew, she was such a chatterbox; but this one may find out a vast deal, and never breathe a word about it, she is so sly. Some fine day we may have the country raised, and the gendarmes down upon us from Strasburg, and all owing to your pretty doll, with her cunning ways of coming over you.”

I think this roused M. de la Tourelle a little from his contemptuous indifference, for he ground an oath through his teeth, and said, “Feel! this dagger is sharp, Henri. If my wife breathes a word, and I am such a fool as not to have stopped her mouth effectually before she can bring down gendarmes upon us, just let that good steel find its way to my heart. Let her guess but one tittle, let her have but one slight suspicion that I am not a ‘grand propriétaire,’ much less imagine that I am a chief of chauffeurs, and she follows Victorine on the long journey beyond Paris that very day.”

“She’ll outwit you yet; or I never judged women well. Those still silent ones are the devil. She’ll be off during some of your absences, having picked out some secret that will break us all on the wheel.”

“Bah!” said his voice; and then in a minute he added,

“ Let her go if she will. But, where she goes, I will follow ; so don't cry before you're hurt.”

By this time, they had nearly stripped the body ; and the conversation turned out what they should do with it. I learnt that the dead man was the *Sieur de Poissy*, a neighbouring gentleman, whom I had often heard of as hunting with my husband. I had never seen him, but they spoke as if he had come upon them while they were robbing some *Cologne* merchant, torturing him after the cruel practice of the *chauffeurs*, by roasting the feet of their victims in order to compel them to reveal any hidden circumstances connected with their wealth, of which the *chauffeurs* afterwards made use ; and this *Sieur de Poissy* coming down upon them, and recognising *M. de la Tourelle*, they had killed him, and brought him thither after nightfall. I heard him whom I called my husband laugh his little light laugh as he spoke of the way in which the dead body had been strapped before one of the riders, in such a way that it appeared to any passer-by as if, in truth, the murderer were tenderly supporting some sick person. He repeated some mocking reply of double meaning, which he himself had given to some one who made inquiry. He enjoyed the play upon words, softly applauding his own wit. And all the time the poor helpless outstretched arms of the dead lay close to his dainty boot ! Then another stooped (my heart stopped beating), and picked up a letter lying on the ground—a letter that had dropped out of *M. de Poissy's* pocket—a letter from his wife, full of tender words of endearment and pretty babblings of love. This was read aloud, with coarse ribald comments on every sentence, each trying to outdo the previous speaker. When they came to some pretty words about a sweet *Maurice*, their little child away with its mother on some visit, they laughed at *M. de la Tourelle*, and told him that he would be hearing such woman's drivelling some day. Up to that moment, I think, I had only feared him, but his unnatural, half-ferocious reply made me hate even more than I dreaded him. But now they grew weary of their savage merriment ; the jewels and watch had been appraised, the money and papers examined ; and apparently there was some necessity for the body being interred quietly and before daybreak. They had not dared to leave him where he was slain, for fear lest people should come and recognise him, and raise the hue and cry upon them. For they all along spoke as if it was their

constant endeavour to keep the immediate neighbourhood of Les Rochers in the most orderly and tranquil condition, so as never to give cause for visits from the gendarmes. They disputed a little as to whether they should make their way into the castle larder through the gallery, and satisfy their hunger before the hasty interment, or afterwards. I listened with eager feverish interest as soon as this meaning of their speeches reached my hot and troubled brain, for at the time the words they uttered seemed only to stamp themselves with terrible force on my memory, so that I could hardly keep from repeating them aloud like a dull, miserable, unconscious echo; but my brain was numb to the sense of what they said, unless I myself were named, and then, I suppose, some instinct of self-preservation stirred within me, and quickened my sense. And how I strained my ears, and nerved my hands and limbs, beginning to twitch with convulsive movements, which I feared might betray me! I gathered every word they spoke, not knowing which proposal to wish for, but feeling that whatever was finally decided upon, my only chance of escape was drawing near. I once feared lest my husband should go to his bedroom before I had had that one chance, in which case he would most likely have perceived my absence. He said that his hands were soiled (I shuddered, for it might be with life-blood), and he would go and cleanse them; but some bitter jest turned his purpose, and he left the room with the other two—left it by the gallery door. Left me alone in the dark with the stiffening corpse!

Now, now was my time, if ever; and yet I could not move. It was not my cramped and stiffened joints that crippled me, it was the sensation of that dead man's close presence. I almost fancied—I almost fancy still—I heard the arm nearest to me move; lift itself up, as if once more imploring, and fall in dead despair. At that fancy—if fancy it were—I screamed aloud in mad terror, and the sound of my own strange voice broke the spell. I drew myself to the side of the table farthest from the corpse, with as much slow caution as if I really could have feared the clutch of that poor dead arm, powerless for evermore. I softly raised myself up, and stood sick and trembling, holding by the table, too dizzy to know what to do next. I nearly fainted, when a low voice spoke—when Amante, from the outside of the door, whispered, "Madame!" The faithful

creature had been on the watch, had heard my scream, and having seen the three ruffians troop along the gallery, down the stairs, and across the court to the offices in the other wing of the castle, she had stolen to the door of the room in which I was. The sound of her voice gave me strength; I walked straight towards it, as one benighted on a dreary moor, suddenly perceiving the small steady light which tells of human dwellings, takes heart, and steers straight onward. Where I was, where that voice was, I knew not; but go to it I must, or die. The door once opened—I know not by which of us—I fell upon her neck, grasping her tight, till my hands ached with the tension of their hold. Yet she never uttered a word. Only she took me up in her vigorous arms, and bore me to my room, and laid me on my bed. I do not know more; as soon as I was placed there I lost sense; I came to myself with a horrible dread lest my husband was by me, with a belief that he was in the room, in hiding, waiting to hear my first words, watching for the least sign of the terrible knowledge I possessed to murder me. I dared not breathe quicker, I measured and timed each heavy inspiration; I did not speak, nor move, nor even open my eyes, for long after I was in my full, my miserable senses. I heard some one treading softly about the room, as if with a purpose, not as if for curiosity, or merely to beguile the time; some one passed in and out of the salon; and I still lay quiet, feeling as if death were inevitable, but wishing that the agony of death were past. Again faintness stole over me; but just as I was sinking into the horrible feeling of nothingness, I heard Amante's voice close to me, saying—

“Drink this, madame, and let us be gone. All is ready.”

I let her put her arm under my head and raise me, and pour something down my throat. All the time she kept talking in a quiet, measured voice, unlike her own, so dry and authoritative; she told me that a suit of her clothes lay ready for me, that she herself was as much disguised as the circumstances permitted her to be, that what provisions I had left from my supper were stowed away in her pockets; and so she went on, dwelling on little details of the most commonplace description, but never alluding for an instant to the fearful cause why flight was necessary. I made no inquiry as to how she knew, or what she knew. I never asked her either then or afterwards; I could not bear it—we kept our dreadful secret close. But I

suppose she must have been in the dressing-room adjoining, and heard all.

In fact, I dared not speak even to her, as if there were anything beyond the most common event in life in our preparing thus to leave the house of blood by stealth in the dead of night. She gave me directions—short condensed directions, without reasons—just as you do to a child; and like a child I obeyed her. She went often to the door and listened; and often, too, she went to the window, and looked anxiously out. For me, I saw nothing but her, and I dared not let my eyes wander from her for a minute; and I heard nothing in the deep midnight silence but her soft movements, and the heavy beating of my own heart. At last she took my hand, and led me in the dark, through the salon, once more into the terrible gallery, where across the black darkness the windows admitted pale sheeted ghosts of light upon the floor. Clinging to her I went; unquestioning—for she was human sympathy to me, after the isolation of my unspeakable terror. On we went, turning to the left instead of to the right, past my suite of sitting-rooms, where the gilding was red with blood, into that unknown wing of the castle that fronted the main road, lying parallel far below. She guided me along the basement passages to which we had now descended, until we came to a little open door, through which the air blew chill and cold, bringing for the first time a sensation of life to me. The door led into a kind of cellar, through which we groped our way to an opening like a window, but which, instead of being glazed, was only fenced with iron bars, two of which were loose, as Amante evidently knew, for she took them out with the ease of one who had performed the action often before, and then helped me to follow her out into the free, open air.

We stole round the end of the building, and on turning the corner—she first—I felt her hold on me tighten for an instant, and the next step I, too, heard distant voices, and the blows of a spade upon the heavy soil, for the night was very warm and still.

We had not spoken a word; we did not speak now. Touch was safer and as expressive. She turned down towards the high road; I followed. I did not know the path; we stumbled again and again, and I was much bruised; so doubtless was she; but bodily pain did me good. At last, we were on the plainer path of the high road.

I had such faith in her that I did not venture to speak, even when she paused, as wondering to which hand she should turn. But now, for the first time, she spoke—

“Which way did you come when he brought you here first?”

I pointed—I could not speak.

We turned in the opposite direction; still going along the high road. In about an hour, we struck up to the mountain-side, scrambling far up before we even dared to rest; far up and away again before day had fully dawned. Then we looked about for some place of rest and concealment; and now we dared to speak in whispers. Amante told me that she had locked the door of communication between his bedroom and mine, and, as in a dream, I was aware that she had also locked and brought away the key of the door between the latter and the salon.

“He will have been too busy this night to think much about you—he will suppose you are asleep—I shall be the first to be missed; but they will only just now be discovering our loss.”

I remember those last words of hers made me pray to go on; I felt as if we were losing precious time in thinking either of rest or concealment; but she hardly replied to me, so busy was she in seeking out some hiding-place. At length, giving it up in despair, we proceeded onwards a little way; the mountain-side sloped downwards rapidly, and in the full morning light we saw ourselves in a narrow valley, made by a stream which forced its way along it. About a mile lower down there rose the pale blue smoke of a village, a mill-wheel was lashing up the water close at hand, though out of sight. Keeping under the cover of every sheltering tree or bush, we worked our way down past the mill, down to a one-arched bridge which doubtless formed part of the road between the village and the mill.

“This will do,” said she; and we crept under the space, and climbing a little way up the rough stone-work, we seated ourselves on a projecting ledge, and crouched in the deep damp shadow. Amante sat a little above me, and made me lay my head on her lap. Then she fed me, and took some food herself; and opening out her great dark cloak, she covered up every light-coloured speck about us; and thus we sat, shivering and shuddering, yet feeling a kind of rest through it all, simply from the fact that motion was no longer imperative, and that during

the daylight our only chance of safety was to be still. But the damp shadow in which we were sitting was blighting, from the circumstance of the sunlight never penetrating there; and I dreaded lest, before night and the time for exertion again came on, I should feel illness creeping all over me. To add to our discomfort, it had rained the whole day long, and the stream, fed by a thousand little mountain brooklets, began to swell into a torrent, rushing over the stones with a perpetual and dizzying noise.

Every now and then I was wakened from the painful doze into which I continually fell, by a sound of horses' feet over our head: sometimes lumbering heavily as if dragging a burden, sometimes rattling and galloping, and with the sharper cry of men's voices coming cutting through the roar of the waters. At length, day fell. We had to drop into the stream, which came above our knees as we waded to the bank. There we stood, stiff and shivering. Even Amante's courage seemed to fail.

"We must pass this night in shelter, somehow," said she. For indeed the rain was coming down pitilessly. I said nothing. I thought that surely the end must be death in some shape; and I only hoped that to death might not be added the terror of the cruelty of men. In a minute or so she had resolved on her course of action. We went up the stream to the mill. The familiar sounds, the scent of the wheat, the flower whitening the walls—all reminded me of home, and it seemed to me as if I must struggle out of this nightmare and waken, and find myself once more a happy girl by the Neckar-side. They were long in unbarring the door at which Amante had knocked; at length, an old feeble voice inquired who was there, and what was sought? Amante answered shelter from the storm for two women; but the old woman replied, with suspicious hesitation, that she was sure it was a man who was asking for shelter, and that she could not let us in. But at length she satisfied herself, and unbarred the heavy door, and admitted us. She was not an unkindly woman; but her thoughts all travelled in one circle, and that was, that her master, the miller, had told her on no account to let any man into the place during his absence, and that she did not know if he would not think two women as bad; and yet that as we were not men, no one could say she had disobeyed him, for it was a shame to let a dog be out such a night

as this. Amante, with ready wit, told her to let no one know that we had taken shelter there that night, and that then her master could not blame her; and while she was thus enjoining secrecy as the wisest course, with a view to far other people than the miller, she was hastily helping me take off my wet clothes, and spreading them, as well as the brown mantle that had covered us both, before the great stove which warmed the room with the effectual heat that the old woman's failing vitality required. All this time the poor creature was discussing with herself as to whether she had disobeyed orders, in a kind of garrulous way that made me fear much for her capability of retaining anything secret if she was questioned. By-and-by, she wandered away to an unnecessary revelation of her master's whereabouts; gone to help in the search for his landlord, the *Sieur de Poissy*, who lived at the *château* just above, and who had not returned from his chase the day before; so the *intendant* imagined he might have met with some accident, and had summoned the neighbours to beat the forest and the hill-side. She told us much besides, giving us to understand that she would fain meet with a place as housekeeper where there were more servants and less to do, as her life here was very lonely and dull, especially since her master's son had gone away—gone to the wars. She then took her supper, which was evidently apportioned out to her with a sparing hand, as, even if the idea had come into her head, she had not enough to offer us any. Fortunately, warmth was all that we required, and that, thanks to Amante's care, was returning to our chilled bodies. After supper, the old woman grew drowsy; but she seemed uncomfortable at the idea of going to sleep and leaving us still in the house. Indeed, she gave us pretty broad hints as to the propriety of our going once more out into the bleak and stormy night; but we begged to be allowed to stay under shelter of some kind; and, at last, a bright idea came over her, and she bade us mount by a ladder to a kind of loft, which went half over the lofty mill-kitchen in which we were sitting. We obeyed her—what else could we do?—and found ourselves in a spacious floor, without any safeguard or wall, boarding, or railing, to keep us from falling over into the kitchen, in case we went too near the edge. It was, in fact, the store-room or garret for the household. There was bedding piled up, boxes and chests, mill sacks, the winter store of apples and nuts,

bundles of old clothes, broken furniture, and many other things. No sooner were we up there, than the old woman dragged the ladder, by which we had ascended, away with a chuckle, as if she was now secure that we could do no mischief, and sat herself down again once more, to doze and await her master's return. We pulled out some bedding, and gladly laid ourselves down in our dried clothes and in some warmth, hoping to have the sleep we so much needed to refresh us and prepare us for the next day. But I could not sleep, and I was aware, from her breathing, that Amante was equally wakeful. We could both see through the crevices between the boards that formed the flooring into the kitchen below, very partially lighted by the common lamp that hung against the wall near the stove on the opposite side to that on which we were.



PORTION III.

FAR on in the night there were voices outside reached us in our hiding-place; an angry knocking at the door, and we saw through the chinks the old woman rouse herself up to go and open it for her master, who came in, evidently half drunk. To my sick horror, he was followed by Lefebvre, apparently as sober and wily as ever. They were talking together as they came in, disputing about something; but the miller stopped the conversation to swear at the old woman for having fallen asleep, and, with tipsy anger, and even with blows, drove the poor old creature out of the kitchen to bed. Then he and Lefebvre went on talking—about the *Sieur de Poissy's* disappearance. It seemed that Lefebvre had been out all day, along with other of my husband's men, ostensibly assisting in the search; in all probability trying to blind the *Sieur de Poissy's* followers by putting them on a wrong scent, and also, I fancied, from one or two of Lefebvre's sly questions, combining the hidden purpose of discovering us.

Although the miller was tenant and vassal to the *Sieur de Poissy*, he seemed to me to be much more in league with the people of *M. de la Tourelle*. He was evidently aware, in part, of the life which Lefebvre and the others led; although, again,

I do not suppose that he knew or imagined one-half of their crimes ; and also, I think, he was seriously interested in discovering the fate of his master, little suspecting Lefebvre of murder or violence. He kept talking himself, and letting out all sorts of thoughts and opinions ; watched by the keen eyes of Lefebvre gleaming out below his shaggy eyebrows. It was evidently not the cue of the latter to let out that his master's wife had escaped from that vile and terrible den ; but though he never breathed a word relating to us, not the less was I certain he was thirsting for our blood, and lying in wait for us at every turn of events. Presently he got up and took his leave ; and the miller bolted him out, and stumbled off to bed. Then we fell asleep, and slept sound and long.

The next morning, when I awoke, I saw Amante, half raised, resting on one hand, and eagerly gazing, with straining eyes, into the kitchen below. I looked too, and both heard and saw the miller and two of his men eagerly and loudly talking about the old woman, who had not appeared as usual to make the fire in the stove, and prepare her master's breakfast, and who now, late on in the morning, had been found dead in her bed ; whether from the effect of her master's blows the night before, or from natural causes, who can tell ? The miller's conscience upbraided him a little, I should say, for he was eagerly declaring his value for his housekeeper, and repeating how often she had spoken of the happy life she led with him. The men might have had their doubts, but they did not wish to offend the miller, and all agreed that the necessary steps should be taken for a speedy funeral. And so they went out, leaving us in our loft, but so much alone, that, for the first time almost, we ventured to speak freely, though still in a hushed voice, pausing to listen continually. Amante took a more cheerful view of the whole occurrence than I did. She said that, had the old woman lived, we should have had to depart that morning, and that this quiet departure would have been the best thing we could have had to hope for, as, in all probability, the housekeeper would have told her master of us and of our resting-place, and this fact would, sooner or later, have been brought to the knowledge of those from whom we most desired to keep it concealed ; but that now we had time to rest, and a shelter to rest in, during the first hot pursuit, which we knew to a fatal certainty was being carried on. The remnants of our food, and the stored-up fruit, would supply us with provision ; the only

thing to be feared was, that something might be required from the loft, and the miller or some one else mount up in search of it. But even then, with a little arrangement of boxes and chests, one part might be so kept in shadow that we might yet escape observation. All this comforted me a little; but, I asked, how were we ever to escape? The ladder was taken away, which was our only means of descent. But Amante replied that she could make a sufficient ladder of the rope lying coiled among other things, to drop us down the ten feet or so—with the advantage of its being portable, so that we might carry it away, and thus avoid all betrayal of the fact that any one had ever been hidden in the loft.

During the two days that intervened before we did escape, Amante made good use of her time. She looked into every box and chest during the man's absence at his mill; and finding in one box an old suit of man's clothes, which had probably belonged to the miller's absent son, she put them on to see if they would fit her; and, when she found that they did, she cut her own hair to the shortness of a man's, made me clip her black eyebrows as close as though they had been shaved, and by cutting up old corks into pieces such as would go into her cheeks, she altered both the shape of her face and her voice to a degree which I should not have believed possible.

All this time I lay like one stunned; my body resting, and renewing its strength, but I myself in an almost idiotic state—else surely I could not have taken the stupid interest which I remember I did in all Amante's energetic preparations for disguise. I absolutely recollect once the feeling of a smile coming over my stiff face as some new exercise of her cleverness proved a success.

But towards the second day, she required me, too, to exert myself; and then all my heavy despair returned. I let her dye my fair hair and complexion with the decaying shells of the stored-up walnuts, I let her blacken my teeth, and even voluntarily broke a front tooth, the better to effect my disguise. But through it all I had no hope of evading my terrible husband. The third night the funeral was over, the drinking ended, the guests gone; the miller put to bed by his men, being too drunk to help himself. They stopped a little while in the kitchen talking and laughing about the new housekeeper likely to come; and they, too, went off shutting, but not locking

the door. Everything favoured us. Amante had tried her ladder on one of the two previous nights, and could, by a dexterous throw from beneath, unfasten it from the hook to which it was fixed, when it had served its office; she made up a bundle of worthless old clothes in order that we might the better preserve our characters of a travelling pedlar and his wife; she stuffed a hump on her back, she thickened my figure, she left her own clothes deep down beneath a heap of others in the chest from which she had taken the man's dress which she wore; and with a few francs in her pocket—the sole money we had either of us had about us when we escaped—we let ourselves down the ladder, unhooked it, and passed into the cold darkness of night again.

We had discussed the route which it would be well for us to take while we lay perdues in our loft. Amante had told me then that her reason for inquiring, when we first left Les Rochers, by which way I had first been brought to it, was to avoid the pursuit which she was sure would first be made in the direction of Germany; but that now she thought we might return to that district of country where my German fashion of speaking French would excite least observation. I thought that Amante herself had something peculiar in her accent, which I had heard M. de la Tourelle sneer at as Norman patois; but I said not a word beyond agreeing to her proposal that we should bend our steps towards Germany. Once there we should, I thought, be safe. Alas! I forgot the unruly time that was overspreading all Europe, overturning all law, and all the protection which law gives.

How we wandered—not daring to ask our way—how we lived, how we struggled through many a danger and still more terrors of danger, I shall not tell you now. I will only relate two of our adventures before we reached Frankfort. The first, although fatal to an innocent lady, was yet, I believe, the cause of my safety; the second I shall tell you, that you may understand why I did not return to my former home, as I had hoped to do when we lay in the miller's loft, and I first became capable of groping after an idea of what my future life might be. I cannot tell you how much in these doubtings and wanderings I became attached to Amante. I have sometimes feared since, lest I cared for her only because she was so necessary to my own safety; but, no! it was not so; or not so only or principally.

She said once that she was flying for her own life as well as for mine ; but we dared not speak much on our danger, or on the horrors that had gone before. We planned a little what was to be our future course ; but even for that we did not look forward long ; how could we, when every day we scarcely knew if we should see the sun go down ? For Amante knew or conjectured far more than I did of the atrocity of the gang to which M. de la Tourelle belonged ; and every now and then, just as we seemed to be sinking into the calm of security, we fell upon traces of a pursuit after us in all directions. Once, I remember—we must have been nearly three weeks wearily walking through unfrequented ways, day after day, not daring to make inquiry as to our whereabouts, nor yet to seem purposeless in our wanderings—we came to a kind of lonely roadside farrier's and blacksmith's. I was so tired that Amante declared that, come what might, we would stay there all night ; and accordingly she entered the house, and boldly announced herself as a travelling tailor, ready to do any odd jobs of work that might be required, for a night's lodging and food for herself and wife. She had adopted this plan once or twice before, and with good success ; for her father had been a tailor in Rouen, and as a girl she had often helped him with his work, and knew the tailor's slang and habits, down to the particular whistle and cry which in France tells so much to those of a trade. At this blacksmith's, as at most other solitary houses far away from a town, there was not only a store of men's clothes laid by as wanting mending when the housewife could afford time, but there was a natural craving after news from a distance, such news as a wandering tailor is bound to furnish. The early November afternoon was closing into evening, as we sat down, she cross-legged on the great table in the blacksmith's kitchen, drawn close to the window, I close behind her, sewing at another part of the same garment, and from time to time well scolded by my seeming husband. All at once she turned round to speak to me. It was only one word, "Courage !" I had seen nothing ; I sat out of the light ; but I turned sick for an instant, and then I braced myself up into a strange strength of endurance to go through I knew not what.

The blacksmith's forge was in a shed beside the house, and fronting the road. I heard the hammers stop plying their continual rhythmical beat. She had seen why they ceased. A

rider had come up to the forge and dismounted, leading his horse in to be re-shod. The broad red light of the forge-fire had revealed the face of the rider to Amante, and she apprehended the consequence that really ensued.

The rider, after some words with the blacksmith, was ushered in by him into the house-place where we sat.

"Here, good wife, a cup of wine and some galette for this gentleman."

"Anything, anything, madam, that I can eat and drink in my hand while my horse is being shod. I am in haste, and must get on to Forbach to-night."

The blacksmith's wife lighted her lamp; Amante had asked her for it five minutes before. How thankful we were that she had not more speedily complied with our request! As it was, we sat in dusk shadow, pretending to stitch away, but scarcely able to see. The lamp was placed on the stove, near which my husband, for it was he, stood and warmed himself. By-and-by he turned round, and looked all over the room, taking us in with about the same degree of interest as the inanimate furniture. Amante, cross-legged, fronting him, stooped over her work, whistling softly all the while. He turned again to the stove, impatiently rubbing his hands. He had finished his wine and galette, and wanted to be off.

"I am in haste, my good woman. Ask thy husband to get on more quickly. I will pay him double if he makes haste."

The woman went out to do his bidding; and he once more turned round to face us. Amante went on to the second part of the tune. He took it up, whistled a second for an instant or so, and then the blacksmith's wife re-entering, he moved towards her, as if to receive her answer the more speedily.

"One moment, monsieur—only one moment. There was a nail out of the off-foreshoe, which my husband is replacing; it would delay monsieur again if that shoe also came off."

"Madame is right," said he, "but my haste is urgent. If madame knew my reasons, she would pardon my impatience. Once a happy husband, now a deserted and betrayed man, I pursue a wife on whom I lavished all my love, but who has abused my confidence, and fled from my house, doubtless to some paramour; carrying off with her all the jewels and money on which she could lay her hands. It is possible madame

may have heard or seen something of her; she was accompanied in her flight by a base, profligate woman from Paris, whom I, unhappy man, had myself engaged for my wife's waiting-maid, little dreaming what corruption I was bringing into my house!"

"Is it possible?" said the good woman, throwing up her hands.

Amante went on whistling a little lower, out of respect to the conversation.

"However, I am tracing the wicked fugitives; I am on their track" (and the handsome, effeminate face looked as ferocious as any demon's). "They will not escape me; but every minute is a minute of misery to me, till I meet my wife. Madame has sympathy, has she not?"

He drew his face into a hard unnatural smile, and then both went out to the forge, as if once more to hasten the blacksmith over his work.

Amante stopped her whistling for one instant.

"Go on as you are, without change of an eyelid even; in a few minutes he will be gone, and it will be over!"

It was a necessary caution, for I was on the point of giving way, and throwing myself weakly upon her neck. We went on, she whistling and stitching, I making semblance to sew. And it was well we did so; for almost directly he came back for his whip, which he had laid down and forgotten; and again I felt one of those sharp, quick-scanning glances, sent all round the room, and taking in all.

Then we heard him ride away; and then—it had been long too dark to see well—I dropped my work, and gave way to my trembling and shuddering. The blacksmith's wife returned. She was a good creature. Amante told her I was cold and weary, and she insisted on my stopping my work, and going to sit near the stove; hastening, at the same time, her preparations for supper, which, in honour of us, and of monsieur's liberal payment, was to be a little less frugal than ordinary. It was well for me that she made me taste a little of the cider-soup she was preparing, or I could not have held up, in spite of Amante's warning look, and the remembrance of her frequent exhortations to act resolutely up to the characters we had assumed, whatever befell. To cover my agitation, Amante stopped her whistling, and began to talk; and, by the time the blacksmith came in,

she and the good woman of the house were in full flow. He began at once upon the handsome gentleman, who had paid him so well; all his sympathy was with him, and both he and his wife only wished he might overtake his wicked wife, and punish her as she deserved. And then the conversation took a turn, not uncommon to those whose lives are quiet and monotonous; every one seemed to vie with each other in telling about some horror; and the savage and mysterious band of robbers called the *Chauffeurs*, who infested all the roads leading to the Rhine, with Schinderhannes at their head, furnished many a tale which made the very marrow of my bones run cold, and quenched even Amante's power of talking. Her eyes grew large and wild, her cheeks blanched, and for once she sought by her looks help from me. The new call upon me roused me; I rose and said, with their permission, my husband and I would seek our bed, for that we had travelled far and were early risers. I added that we would get up betimes, and finish our piece of work. The blacksmith said we should be early birds if we rose before him; and the good wife seconded my proposal with kindly bustle. One other such story as those they had been relating, and I do believe Amante would have fainted.

As it was, a night's rest set her up; we arose and finished our work betimes, and shared the plentiful breakfast of the family. Then we had to set forth again; only knowing that to Forbach we must not go, yet believing, as was indeed the case, that Forbach lay between us and that Germany to which we were directing our course. Two days more we wandered on, making a round, I suspect, and returning upon the road to Forbach, a league or two nearer to that town than the blacksmith's house. But as we never made inquiries I hardly knew where we were, when we came one night to a small town, with a good large rambling inn in the very centre of the principal street. We had begun to feel as if there were more safety in towns than in the loneliness of the country. As we had parted with a ring of mine not many days before to a travelling jeweller, who was too glad to purchase it far below its real value to make many inquiries as to how it came into the possession of a poor working tailor, such as Amante seemed to be, we resolved to stay at this inn all night; and gather such particulars and information as we could by which to direct our onward course.

We took our supper in the darkest corner of the *salle-à-*

manger, having previously bargained for a small bedroom across the court, and over the stables. We needed food sorely; but we hurried on our meal from dread of any one entering that public room who might recognise us. Just in the middle of our meal, the public diligence drove lumbering up under the *porte cochère*, and disgorged its passengers. Most of them turned into the room where we sat, cowering and fearful, for the door was opposite to the porter's lodge, and both opened on to the wide-covered entrance from the street. Among the passengers came in a young fair-haired lady, attended by an elderly French maid. The poor young creature tossed her head and shrank away from the common room, full of evil smells and promiscuous company, and demanded, in German French, to be taken to some private apartment. We heard that she and her maid had come in the coupé, and, probably from pride, poor young lady! she had avoided all association with her fellow-passengers, thereby exciting their dislike and ridicule. All these little pieces of hearsay had a significance to us afterwards, though, at the time, the only remark made that bore upon the future was Amante's whisper to me that the young lady's hair was exactly the colour of mine, which she had cut off and burnt in the stove in the miller's kitchen in one of her descents from our hiding-place in the loft.

As soon as we could, we struck round in the shadow, leaving the boisterous and merry fellow-passengers to their supper. We crossed the court, borrowed a lantern from the ostler, and scrambled up the rude steps to our chamber above the stable. There was no door into it; the entrance was the hole into which the ladder fitted. The window looked into the court. We were tired and soon fell asleep. I was wakened by a noise in the stable below. One instant of listening, and I wakened Amante, placing my hand on her mouth, to prevent any exclamation in her half-roused state. We heard my husband speaking about his horse to the ostler. It was his voice. I am sure of it. Amante said so too. We durst not move to rise and satisfy ourselves. For five minutes or so he went on giving directions. Then he left the stable, and, softly stealing to our window, we saw him cross the court and re-enter the inn. We consulted as to what we should do. We feared to excite remark or suspicion by descending and leaving our chamber, or else immediate escape was our strongest idea. Then the ostler left the stable, locking the door on the outside.

"We must try and drop through the window—if indeed it is well to go at all," said Amante.

With reflection came wisdom. We should excite suspicion by leaving without paying our bill. We were on foot, and might easily be pursued. So we sat on our bed's edge, talking and shivering, while from across the court the laughter rang merrily, and the company slowly dispersed one by one, their lights flitting past the windows as they went upstairs and settled each one to his rest.

We crept into our bed, holding each other tight, and listening to every sound, as if we thought we were tracked, and might meet our death at any moment. In the dead of night, just at the profound stillness preceding the turn into another day, we heard a soft, cautious step crossing the yard. The key into the stable was turned—some one came into the stable—we felt rather than heard him there. A horse started a little, and made a restless movement with his feet, then whinnied recognition. He who had entered made two or three low sounds to the animal, and then led him into the court. Amante sprang to the window with the noiseless activity of a cat. She looked out, but dared not speak a word. We heard the great door into the street open—a pause for mounting, and the horse's footsteps were lost in distance.

Then Amante came back to me. "It was he! he is gone!" said she, and once more we lay down, trembling and shaking.

This time we fell sound asleep. We slept long and late. We were wakened by many hurrying feet, and many confused voices; all the world seemed awake and astir. We rose and dressed ourselves, and coming down we looked around among the crowd collected in the courtyard, in order to assure ourselves *he* was not there before we left the shelter of the stable.

The instant we were seen, two or three people rushed to us.

"Have you heard?—Do you know?—That poor young lady—oh, come and see!" And so we were hurried, almost in spite of ourselves, across the court and up the great open stairs of the main building of the inn, into a bedchamber where lay the beautiful young German lady, so full of graceful pride the night before, now white and still in death. By her stood the French maid, crying and gesticulating.

"Oh, Madame! if you had but suffered me to stay with you! Oh! the baron, what will he say?" and so she went on. Her

state had but just been discovered; it had been supposed that she was fatigued, and was sleeping late, until a few minutes before. The surgeon of the town had been sent for, and the landlord of the inn was trying vainly to enforce order until he came, and, from time to time, drinking little cups of brandy, and offering them to the guests, who were all assembled there, pretty much as the servants were doing in the courtyard.

At last the surgeon came. All fell back, and hung on the words that were to fall from his lips.

"See!" said the landlord. "This lady came last night by the diligence with her maid. Doubtless, a great lady, for she must have a private sitting-room"——

"She was Madame the Baroness de Rœder," said the French maid.

—"And was difficult to please in the matter of supper, and a sleeping-room. She went to bed well, though fatigued. Her maid left her"——

"I begged to be allowed to sleep in her room, as we were in a strange inn, of the character of which we knew nothing; but she would not let me, my mistress was such a great lady."

—"And slept with my servants," continued the landlord. "This morning we thought madame was still slumbering; but when eight, nine, ten, and near eleven o'clock came, I bade her maid use my pass-key, and enter her room"——

"The door was not locked, only closed. And here she was found—dead, is she not, monsieur?—with her face down on her pillow, and her beautiful hair all scattered wild; she would never let me tie it up, saying it made her head ache. Such hair!" said the waiting-maid, lifting up a long golden tress, and letting it fall again.

I remembered Amante's words the night before, and crept close up to her.

Meanwhile, the doctor was examining the body underneath the bedclothes, which the landlord, until now, had not allowed to be disarranged. The surgeon drew out his hand, all bathed and stained with blood; and holding up a short sharp knife, with a piece of paper fastened round it.

"Here has been foul play," he said. "The deceased lady has been murdered. This dagger was aimed straight at her heart." Then putting on his spectacles, he read the writing on the bloody paper, dimmed and horribly obscured as it was:—

NUMÉRO UN.

Ainsi les Chauffeurs se vengent.

"Let us go!" said I to Amante. "Oh, let us leave this horrible place!"

"Wait a little," said she. "Only a few minutes more. It will be better."

Immediately the voices of all proclaimed their suspicions of the cavalier who had arrived last the night before. He had, they said, made so many inquiries about the young lady whose supercilious conduct all in the *salle-à-manger* had been discussing on his entrance. They were talking about her as we left the room; he must have come in directly afterwards, and not until he had learnt all about her had he spoken of the business which necessitated his departure at dawn of day, and made his arrangements with both landlord and ostler for the possession of the keys of the stable and *porte cochère*. In short, there was no doubt as to the murderer, even before the arrival of the legal functionary who had been sent for by the surgeon; but the word on the paper chilled every one with terror. Les Chauffeurs, who were they? No one knew; some of the gang might even then be in the room overhearing, and noting down fresh objects for vengeance. In Germany, I had heard little of this terrible gang, and I had paid no greater heed to the stories related once or twice about them in Carlsruhe than one does to tales about ogres. But here, in their very haunts, I learnt the full amount of the terror they inspired. No one would be legally responsible for any evidence criminating the murderer. The public prosecutor shrank from the duties of his office. What do I say? Neither Amante nor I, knowing far more of the actual guilt of the man who had killed that poor sleeping young lady, durst breathe a word. We appeared to be wholly ignorant of everything: we, who might have told so much. But how could we? we were broken down with terrific anxiety and fatigue, with the knowledge that we, above all, were doomed victims; and that the blood, heavily dripping from the bed-clothes on to the floor, was dripping thus out of the poor dead body because, when living, she had been mistaken for me.

At length Amante went up to the landlord, and asked permission to leave his inn, doing all openly and humbly, so as to

excite neither ill-will nor suspicion. Indeed, suspicion was otherwise directed, and he willingly gave us leave to depart. A few days afterwards we were across the Rhine, in Germany, making our way towards Frankfort, but still keeping our disguises, and Amante still working at her trade.

On the way we met a young man, a wandering journeyman from Heidelberg. I knew him, although I did not choose that he should know me. I asked him, as carelessly as I could, how the old miller was now? He told me he was dead. This realisation of the worst apprehensions caused by his long silence shocked me inexpressibly. It seemed as though every prop gave way from under me. I had been talking to Amante only that very day of the safety and comfort of the home that awaited her in my father's house; of the gratitude which the old man would feel towards her; and how there, in that peaceful dwelling, far away from the terrible land of France, she should find ease and security for all the rest of her life. All this I thought I had to promise, and even yet more had I looked for, for myself. I looked to the unburdening of my heart and conscience by telling all I knew to my best and wisest friend. I looked to his love as a sure guidance as well as a comforting stay, and, behold, he has gone away from me for ever!

I had left the room hastily on hearing of this sad news from the Heidelberger. Presently, Amante followed.

"Poor madame," said she, consoling me to the best of her ability. And then she told me by degrees what more she had learned respecting my home, about which she knew almost as much as I did, from my frequent talks on the subject both at Les Rochers and on the dreary, doleful road we had come along. She had continued the conversation after I left, by asking about my brother and his wife. Of course, they lived on at the mill, but the man said (with what truth I know not, but I believed it firmly at the time) that Babette had completely got the upper hand of my brother, who only saw through her eyes and heard with her ears. That there had been much Heidelberg gossip of late days about her sudden intimacy with a grand French gentleman who had appeared at the mill—a relation, by marriage—married, in fact, to the miller's sister, who, by all accounts, had behaved abominably and ungratefully. But that was no reason for Babette's extreme

and sudden intimacy with him, going about everywhere with the French gentleman; and since he left (as the Heidelberger said he knew for a fact) corresponding with him constantly. Yet her husband saw no harm in it all, seemingly; though, to be sure, he was so out of spirits, what with his father's death and the news of his sister's infamy, that he hardly knew how to hold up his head.

"Now," said Amante, "all this proves that M. de la Tourelle has suspected that you would go back to the nest in which you were reared, and that he has been there, and found that you have not yet returned; but probably he still imagines that you will do so, and has accordingly engaged your sister-in-law as a kind of informant. Madame has said that her sister-in-law bore her no extreme good-will; and the defamatory story he has got the start of us in spreading, will not tend to increase the favour in which your sister-in-law holds you. No doubt the assassin was retracing his steps when we met him near Forbach, and having heard of the poor German lady, with her French maid, and her pretty blonde complexion, he followed her. If madame will still be guided by me—and, my child, I beg of you still to trust me," said Amante, breaking out of her respectful formality into the way of talking more natural to those who had shared and escaped from common dangers—more natural, too, where the speaker was conscious of a power of protection which the other did not possess—"we will go on to Frankfort, and lose ourselves, for a time at least, in the numbers of people who throng a great town: and you have told me that Frankfort is a great town. We will still be husband and wife; we will take a small lodging, and you shall housekeep and live indoors. I, as the rougher and the more alert, will continue my father's trade, and seek work at the tailors' shops."

I could think of no better plan, so we followed this out. In a back street at Frankfort we found two furnished rooms to let on a sixth storey. The one we entered had no light from day; a dingy lamp swung perpetually from the ceiling, and from that, or from the open door leading into the bedroom beyond, came our only light. The bedroom was more cheerful, but very small. Such as it was, it almost exceeded our possible means. The money from the sale of my ring was almost exhausted, and Amante was a stranger in the place, speaking only French,

moreover, and the good Germans were hating the French people right heartily. However, we succeeded better than our hopes, and even laid by a little against the time of my confinement. I never stirred abroad, and saw no one, and Amante's want of knowledge of German kept her in a state of comparative isolation.

At length my child was born—my poor worse than fatherless child. It was a girl, as I had prayed for. I had feared lest a boy might have something of the tiger nature of its father, but a girl seemed all my own. And yet not all my own, for the faithful Amante's delight and glory in the babe almost exceeded mine; in outward show it certainly did.

We had not been able to afford any attendance beyond what a neighbouring sage-femme could give, and she came frequently, bringing in with her a little store of gossip, and wonderful tales culled out of her own experience, every time. One day she began to tell me about a great lady in whose service her daughter had lived as scullion, or some such thing. Such a beautiful lady! with such a handsome husband. But grief comes to the palace as well as to the garret, and why or wherefore no one knew, but somehow the Baron de Rœder must have incurred the vengeance of the terrible Chauffeurs; for not many months ago, as madame was going to see her relations in Alsace, she was stabbed dead as she lay in bed at some hotel on the road. Had I not seen it in the *Gazette*? Had I not heard? Why, she had been told that as far off as Lyons there were placards offering a heavy reward on the part of the Baron de Rœder for information respecting the murderer of his wife. But no one could help him, for all who could bear evidence were in such terror of the Chauffeurs; there were hundreds of them, she had been told, rich and poor, great gentlemen and peasants, all leagued together by most frightful oaths to hunt to the death any one who bore witness against them; so that even they who survived the tortures to which the Chauffeurs subjected many of the people whom they plundered, dared not to recognise them again, would not dare, even did they see them at the bar of a court of justice; for, if one were condemned, were there not hundreds sworn to avenge his death?

I told all this to Amante, and we began to fear that if M. de la Tourelle, or Lefebvre, or any of the gang at Les Rochers,

had seen these placards, they would know that the poor lady stabbed by the former was the Baroness de Roeder, and that they would set forth again in search of me.

This fresh apprehension told on my health and impeded my recovery. We had so little money we could not call in a physician, at least not one in established practice. But Amante found out a young doctor, for whom indeed she had sometimes worked; and offering to pay him in kind, she brought him to see me, her sick wife. He was very gentle and thoughtful, though, like ourselves, very poor. But he gave much time and consideration to the case, saying once to Amante that he saw my constitution had experienced some severe shock from which it was probable that my nerves would never entirely recover. By-and-by I shall name this doctor, and then you will know, better than I can describe, his character.

I grew strong in time—stronger, at least. I was able to work a little at home, and to sun myself and my baby at the garret-window in the roof. It was all the air I dared to take. I constantly wore the disguise I had first set out with; as constantly had I renewed the disfiguring dye which changed my hair and complexion. But the perpetual state of terror in which I had been during the whole months succeeding my escape from Les Rochers made me loathe the idea of ever again walking in the open daylight, exposed to the sight and recognition of every passer-by. In vain Amante reasoned—in vain the doctor urged. Docile in every other thing, in this I was obstinate. I would not stir out. One day Amante returned from her work, full of news—some of it good, some such as to cause us apprehension. The good news was this; the master for whom she worked as journeyman was going to send her with some others to a great house at the other side of Frankfort, where there were to be private theatricals, and where many new dresses and much alteration of old ones would be required. The tailors employed were all to stay at this house until the day of representation was over, as it was at some distance from the town, and no one could tell when their work would be ended. But the pay was to be proportionately good.

The other thing she had to say was this: she had that day met the travelling jeweller to whom she and I had sold my ring. It was rather a peculiar one, given to me by my husband; we had felt at the time that it might be the means of tracing us, but

we were penniless and starving, and what else could we do? She had seen that this Frenchman had recognised her at the same instant that she did him, and she thought at the same time that there was a gleam of more than common intelligence on his face as he did so. This idea had been confirmed by his following her for some way on the other side of the street; but she had evaded him with her better knowledge of the town, and the increasing darkness of the night. Still it was well that she was going to such a distance from our dwelling on the next day; and she had brought me in a stock of provisions, begging me to keep within doors, with a strange kind of fearful oblivion of the fact that I had never set foot beyond the threshold of the house since I had first entered it—scarce ever ventured down the stairs. But, although my poor, my dear, very faithful Amante was like one possessed that last night, she spoke continually of the dead, which is a bad sign for the living. She kissed you—yes! it was you, my daughter, my darling, whom I bore beneath my bosom away from the fearful castle of your father—I call him so for the first time, I must call him so once again before I have done—Amante kissed you, sweet baby, blessed little comforter, as if she never could leave off. And then she went away, alive.

Two days, three days passed away. That third evening I was sitting within my bolted doors—you asleep on your pillow by my side—when a step came up the stair, and I knew it must be for me; for ours were the topmost rooms. Some one knocked; I held my very breath. But some one spoke, and I knew it was the good Doctor Voss. Then I crept to the door, and answered.

“Are you alone?” asked I.

“Yes,” said he, in a still lower voice. “Let me in.” I let him in, and he was as alert as I in bolting and barring the door. Then he came and whispered to me his doleful tale. He had come from the hospital in the opposite quarter of the town, the hospital which he visited; he should have been with me sooner, but he had feared lest he should be watched. He had come from Amante’s deathbed. Her fears of the jeweller were too well founded. She had left the house where she was employed that morning, to transact some errand connected with her work in the town; she must have been followed, and dogged on her way back through solitary wood-paths, for some of the wood-rangers belonging to the great house had

found her lying there, stabbed to death, but not dead; with the poniard again plunged through the fatal writing, once more; but this time with the word "un" underlined, so as to show that the assassin was aware of his previous mistake:—

Numéro *Un*.

Ainsi les Chauffeurs se vengent.

They had carried her to the house, and given her restoratives till she had recovered the feeble use of her speech. But, oh, faithful, dear friend and sister! even then she remembered me, and refused to tell (what no one else among her fellow-workmen knew) where she lived or with whom. Life was ebbing away fast, and they had no resource but to carry her to the nearest hospital, where, of course, the fact of her sex was made known. Fortunately both for her and for me, the doctor in attendance was the very Doctor Voss whom we already knew. To him, while awaiting her confessor, she told enough to enable him to understand the position in which I was left; before the priest had heard half her tale, Amante was dead.

Doctor Voss told me he had made all sorts of *détours*, and waited thus, late at night, for fear of being watched and followed. But I do not think he was. At any rate, as I afterwards learnt from him, the Baron Røeder, on hearing of the similitude of this murder with that of his wife in every particular, made such a search after the assassins, that, although they were not discovered, they were compelled to take to flight for the time.

I can hardly tell you now by what arguments Dr. Voss, at first merely my benefactor, sparing me a portion of his small modicum, at length persuaded me to become his wife. His wife he called it, I called it; for we went through the religious ceremony too much slighted at the time, and as we were both Lutherans, and M. de la Tourelle had pretended to be of the reformed religion, a divorce from the latter would have been easily procurable by German law, both ecclesiastical and legal, could we have summoned so fearful a man into any court.

The good doctor took me and my child by stealth to his modest dwelling; and there I lived in the same deep retirement, never seeing the full light of day, although when the dye had once passed away from my face my husband did not wish

me to renew it. There was no need ; my yellow hair was grey, my complexion was ashen-coloured, no creature could have recognised the fresh-coloured, bright-haired young woman of eighteen months before. The few people whom I saw knew me only as Madame Voss ; a widow much older than himself, whom Dr. Voss had secretly married. They called me the Grey Woman.

He made me give you his surname. Till now you have known no other father—while he lived you needed no father's love. Once only, only once more, did the old terror come upon me. For some reason, which I forget, I broke through my usual custom, and went to the window of my room for some purpose, either to shut or to open it. Looking out into the street for an instant, I was fascinated by the sight of M. de la Tourelle, gay, young, elegant as ever, walking along on the opposite side of the street. The noise I had made with the window caused him to look up ; he saw me, an old grey woman, and he did not recognise me ! Yet it was not three years since we had parted, and his eyes were keen and dreadful, like those of the lynx.

I told M. Voss, on his return home, and he tried to cheer me, but the shock of seeing M. de la Tourelle had been too terrible for me. I was ill for long months afterwards.

Once again I saw him. Dead. He and Lefebvre were at last caught ; hunted down by the Baron de Røeder in some of their crimes. Dr. Voss had heard of their arrest ; their condemnation, their death ; but he never said a word to me, until one day he bade me show him that I loved him by my obedience and my trust. He took me a long carriage-journey, where to I know not, for we never spoke of that day again ; I was led through a prison, into a closed courtyard, where, decently draped in the last robes of death, concealing the marks of decapitation, lay M. de la Tourelle, and two or three others, whom I had known at Les Rochers :

After that conviction Dr. Voss tried to persuade me to return to a more natural mode of life, and to go out more. But although I sometimes complied with his wish, yet the old terror was ever strong upon me, and he, seeing what an effort it was, gave up urging me at last.

You know all the rest. How we both mourned bitterly the loss of that dear husband and father—for such I will call him

ever—and as such you must consider him, my child, after this one revelation is over.

Why has it been made? you ask. For this reason, my child. The lover, whom you have only known as M. Lebrun, a French artist, told me but yesterday his real name, dropped because the bloodthirsty Republicans might consider it as too aristocratic. It is Maurice de Poissy.



THE
HEART OF JOHN MIDDLETON.

I WAS born at Sawley, where the shadow of Pendle Hill falls at sunrise. I suppose Sawley sprang up into a village in the time of the monks, who had an abbey there. Many of the cottages are strange old places; others, again, are built of the abbey stones, mixed up with the shale from the neighbouring quarries; and you may see many a quaint bit of carving worked into the walls, or forming the lintels of the doors. There is a row of houses, built still more recently, where one Mr. Peel came to live for the sake of the water-power, and gave the place a fillip into something like life—though a different kind of life, as I take it, from the grand, slow ways folks had when the monks were about.

Now it was—six o'clock, ring the bell, throng to the factory; sharp home at twelve; and even at night, when work was done, we hardly knew how to walk slowly, we had been so hustled all day long. I can't recollect the time when I did not go to the factory. My father used to drag me there when I was quite a little fellow, in order to wind reels for him. I never remember my mother. I should have been a better man than I have been, if I had only had a notion of the sound of her voice, or the look on her face.

My father and I lodged in the house of a man who also worked in the factory. We were sadly thronged in Sawley, so many people came from different parts of the country to earn a livelihood at the new work; and it was some time before the row of cottages I have spoken of could be built. While they were building, my father was turned out of his lodgings for drinking and being disorderly, and he and I slept in the brick-kiln; that is to say, when we did sleep o'

nights; but, often and often, we went poaching; and many a hare and pheasant have I rolled up in clay, and roasted in the embers of the kiln. Then, as followed to reason, I was drowsy next day over my work; but father had no mercy on me for sleeping, for all he knew the cause of it, but kicked me where I lay, a heavy lump on the factory floor, and cursed and swore at me till I got up for very fear, and to my winding again. But, when his back was turned, I paid him off with heavier curses than he had given me, and longed to be a man, that I might be revenged on him. The words I then spoke I would not now dare to repeat; and, worse than hating words, a hating heart went with them. I forget the time when I did not know how to hate. When I first came to read, and learnt about Ishmael, I thought I must be of his doomed race, for my hand was against every man, and every man's against me. But I was seventeen or more before I cared for my book enough to learn to read.

After the row of cottages was finished, father took one, and set up for himself, in letting lodgings. I can't say much for the furnishing; but there was plenty of straw, and we kept up good fires; and there is a set of people who value warmth above everything. The worst lot about the place lodged with us. We used to have a supper in the middle of the night; there was game enough, or if there was not game, there was poultry to be had for the stealing. By day, we all made a show of working in the factory. By night, we feasted and drank.

Now this web of my life was black enough, and coarse enough; but by-and-by, a little golden, filmy thread began to be woven in—the dawn of God's mercy was at hand.

One blowy October morning, as I sauntered lazily along to the mill, I came to the little wooden bridge over a brook that falls into the Bribble. On the plank there stood a child, balancing the pitcher on her head, with which she had been to fetch water. She was so light on her feet that, had it not been for the weight of the pitcher, I almost believe the wind would have taken her up, and wafted her away as it carries off a blow-ball in seed-time; her blue cotton dress was blown before her, as if she were spreading her wings for a flight; she turned her face round, as if to ask me for something, but when she saw who it was, she hesitated, for I had a bad name

in the village, and I doubt not she had been warned against me. But her heart was too innocent to be distrustful; so she said to me, timidly—

“Please, John Middleton, will you carry me this heavy jug just over the bridge?”

It was the very first time I had ever been spoken to gently. I was ordered here and there by my father and his rough companions; I was abused, and cursed by them if I failed in doing what they wished; if I succeeded, there came no expression of thanks or gratitude. I was informed of facts necessary for me to know. But the gentle words of request or entreaty were aforesaid unknown to me, and now their tones fell on my ear soft and sweet as a distant peal of bells. I wished that I knew how to speak properly in reply; but though we were of the same standing as regarded worldly circumstances, there was some mighty difference between us, which made me unable to speak in her language of soft words and modest entreaty. There was nothing for me but to take up the pitcher in a kind of gruff, shy silence, and carry it over the bridge, as she had asked me. When I gave it her back again, she thanked me and tripped away, leaving me, wordless, gazing after her like an awkward lout as I was. I knew well enough who she was. She was grandchild to Eleanor Hadfield, an aged woman, who was reputed as a witch by my father and his set, for no other reason, that I can make out, than her scorn, dignity, and fearlessness of rancour. It was true we often met her in the grey dawn of the morning, when we returned from poaching, and my father used to curse her, under his breath, for a witch, such as were burnt long ago on Pendle Hill top; but I had heard that Eleanor was a skilful sick nurse, and ever ready to give her services to those who were ill; and I believe that she had been sitting up through the night (the night that we had been spending under the wild heavens, in deeds as wild) with those who were appointed to die. Nelly was her orphan granddaughter—her little handmaiden, her treasure, her one ewe lamb. Many and many a day have I watched by the brook-side, hoping that some happy gust of wind, coming with opportune bluster down the hollow of the dale, might make me necessary once more to her. I longed to hear her speak to me again. I said the words she had used to myself, trying

to catch her tone; but the chance never came again. I do not know that she ever knew how I watched for her there. I found out that she went to school, and nothing would serve me but that I must go too. My father scoffed at me; I did not care. I knew nought of what reading was, nor that it was likely that I should be laughed at; I, a great hulking lad of seventeen or upwards, for going to learn my A, B, C, in the midst of a crowd of little ones. I stood just this way in my mind. Nelly was at school; it was the best place for seeing her, and hearing her voice again. Therefore I would go too. My father talked, and swore, and threatened, but I stood to it. He said I should leave school, weary of it in a month. I swore a deeper oath than I like to remember, that I would stay a year, and come out a reader and a writer. My father hated the notion of folks learning to read, and said it took all the spirit out of them: besides, he thought he had a right to every penny of my wages, and though, when he was in good humour, he might have given me many a jug of ale, he grudged my twopence a week for schooling. However, to school I went. It was a different place to what I had thought it before I went inside. The girls sat on one side, and the boys on the other; so I was not near Nelly. She, too, was in the first class; I was put with the little toddling things that could hardly run alone. The master sat in the middle, and kept pretty strict watch over us. But I could see Nelly, and hear her read her chapter; and even when it was one with a long list of hard names, such as the master was very fond of giving her, to show how well she could hit them off without spelling, I thought I had never heard a prettier music. Now and then she read other things. I did not know what they were, true or false; but I listened because she read; and, by-and-by, I began to wonder. I remember the first word I ever spoke to her was to ask her (as we were coming out of school) who was the Father of whom she had been reading, for when she said the words "Our Father," her voice dropped into a soft, holy kind of low sound, which struck me more than any loud reading, it seemed so loving and tender. When I asked her this, she looked at me with her great blue wondering eyes, at first shocked; and then, as it were, melted down into pity and sorrow, she said in

the same way, below her breath, in which she read the words, "Our Father,"—

"Don't you know? It is God."

"God?"

"Yes; the God that grandmother tells me about."

"Tell me what she says, will you?" So we sat down on the hedge-bank, she a little above me, while I looked up into her face, and she told me all the holy texts her grandmother had taught her, as explaining all that could be explained of the Almighty. I listened in silence, for indeed I was overwhelmed with astonishment. Her knowledge was principally rote-knowledge; she was too young for much more; but we, in Lancashire, speak a rough kind of Bible language, and the texts seemed very clear to me. I rose up, dazed and overpowered. I was going away in silence, when I bethought me of my manners, and turned back, and said "Thank you," for the first time I ever remember saying it in my life. That was a great day for me, in more ways than one.

I was always one who could keep very steady to an object when once I had set it before me. My object was to know Nelly. I was conscious of nothing more. But it made me regardless of all other things. The master might scold, the little ones might laugh; I bore it all without giving it a second thought. I kept to my year, and came out a reader and writer; more, however, to stand well in Nelly's good opinion, than because of my oath. About this time, my father committed some bad, cruel deed, and had to fly the country. I was glad he went; for I had never loved or cared for him, and wanted to shake myself clear of his set. But it was no easy matter. Honest folk stood aloof; only bad men held out their arms to me with a welcome. Even Nelly seemed to have a mixture of fear now with her kind ways towards me. I was the son of John Middleton, who, if he were caught, would be hung at Lancaster Castle. I thought she looked at me sometimes with a sort of sorrowful horror. Others were not forbearing enough to keep their expression of feeling confined to looks. The son of the overlooker at the mill never ceased twitting me with my father's crime; he now brought up his poaching against him, though I knew very well how many a good supper he himself had made

on game which had been given him to make him and his father wink at late hours in the morning. And how were such as my father to come honestly by game?

This lad, Dick Jackson, was the bane of my life. He was a year or two older than I was, and had much power over the men who worked at the mill, as he could report to his father what he chose. I could not always hold my peace when he "threaped" me with my father's sins, but gave it him back sometimes in a storm of passion. It did me no good; only threw me farther from the company of better men, who looked aghast and shocked at the oaths I poured out—blasphemous words learnt in my childhood, which I could not forget now that I would fain have purified myself of them; while all the time Dick Jackson stood by, with a mocking smile of intelligence; and when I had ended, breathless and weary with spent passion, he would turn to those whose respect I longed to earn, and ask if I were not a worthy son of my father, and likely to tread in his steps. But this smiling indifference of his to my miserable vehemence was not all, though it was the worst part of his conduct, for it made the rankling hatred grow up in my heart, and overshadow it like the great gourd-tree of the prophet Jonah. But his was a merciful shade, keeping out the burning sun; mine blighted what it fell upon.

What Dick Jackson did besides, was this. His father was a skilful overlooker, and a good man. Mr. Peel valued him so much, that he was kept on, although his health was failing; and when he was unable, through illness, to come to the mill, he deputed his son to watch over, and report the men. It was too much power for one so young—I speak it calmly now. Whatever Dick Jackson became, he had strong temptations when he was young, which will be allowed for hereafter. But at the time of which I am telling, my hate raged like a fire. I believed that he was the one sole obstacle to my being received as fit to mix with good and honest men. I was sick of crime and disorder, and would fain have come over to a different kind of life and have been industrious, sober, honest, and right-spoken (I had no idea of higher virtue then), and at every turn Dick Jackson met me with his sneers. I have walked the night through, in the old abbey field, planning how I could outwit him, and win men's respect in spite of him.

The first time I ever prayed was underneath the silent stars, kneeling by the old abbey walls, throwing up my arms, and asking God for the power of revenge upon him.

I had heard that if I prayed earnestly, God would give me what I asked for, and I looked upon it as a kind of chance for the fulfilment of my wishes. If earnestness would have won the boon for me, never were wicked words so earnestly spoken. And oh, later on, my prayer was heard, and my wish granted! All this time I saw little of Nelly. Her grandmother was failing, and she had much to do indoors. Besides, I believed I had read her looks aright, when I took them to speak of aversion; and I planned to hide myself from her sight, as it were, until I could stand upright before men, with fearless eyes, dreading no face of accusation. It was possible to acquire a good character; I would do it—I did it: but no one brought up among respectable untempted people can tell the unspeakable hardness of the task. In the evenings I would not go forth among the village throng; for the acquaintances that claimed me were my father's old associates, who would have been glad enough to enlist a strong young man like me in their projects; and the men who would have shunned me, and kept aloof, were the steady and orderiy. So I stayed indoors, and practised myself in reading. You will say I should have found it easier to earn a good character away from Sawley, at some place where neither I nor my father was known. So I should; but it would not have been the same thing to my mind. Besides, representing all good men, all goodness to me, in Sawley Nelly lived. In her sight I would work out my life, and fight my way upwards to men's respect. Two years passed on. Every day I strove fiercely; every day my struggles were made fruitless by the son of the overlooker; and I seemed but where I was—but where I must ever be esteemed by all who knew me—but as the son of the criminal—wild, reckless, ripe for crime myself. Where was the use of my reading and writing? These acquirements were disregarded and scouted by those among whom I was thrust back to take my portion. I could have read any chapter in the Bible now; and Nelly seemed as though she would never know it. I was driven in upon my books; and few enough of them I had. The pedlars brought them round in their packs, and I bought what I

could. I had the "Seven Champions," and the "Pilgrim's Progress;" and both seemed to me equally wonderful, and equally founded on fact. I got Byron's "Narrative," and Milton's "Paradise Lost;" but I lacked the knowledge which would give a clue to all. Still they afforded me pleasure, because they took me out of myself, and made me forget my miserable position, and made me unconscious (for the time at least) of my one great passion of hatred against Dick Jackson.

When Nelly was about seventeen her grandmother died. I stood aloof in the churchyard, behind the great yew-tree, and watched the funeral. It was the first religious service that ever I heard; and to my shame, as I thought, it affected me to tears. The words seemed so peaceful and holy that I longed to go to church; but I durst not, because I had never been. The parish church was at Bolton, far enough away to serve as an excuse for all who did not care to go. I heard Nelly's sobs filling up every pause in the clergyman's voice; and every sob of hers went to my heart. She passed me on her way out of the churchyard; she was so near I might have touched her; but her head was hanging down, and I durst not speak to her. Then the question arose, what was to become of her? She must earn her living; was it to be as a farm-servant or by working at the mill? I knew enough of both kinds of life to make me tremble for her. My wages were such as to enable me to marry, if I chose; and I never thought of woman, for my wife, but Nelly. Still, I would not have married her now, if I could; for, as yet, I had not risen up to the character which I determined it was fit that Nelly's husband should have. When I was rich in good report, I would come forward and take my chance, but until then I would hold my peace. I had faith in the power of my long-continued dogged breasting of opinion. Sooner or later it must, it should, yield, and I be received among the ranks of good men. But, meanwhile, what was to become of Nelly? I reckoned up my wages; I went to inquire what the board of a girl would be who should help her in her household work, and live with her as a daughter, at the house of one of the most decent women of the place; she looked at me suspiciously. I kept down my temper, and told her I would never come near the place; that I

would keep away from that end of the village, and that the girl for whom I made the inquiry should never know but what the parish paid for her keep. It would not do; she suspected me; but I know I had power over myself to have kept my word; and besides, I would not for worlds have had Nelly put under any obligation to me, which should speck the purity of her love, or dim it by a mixture of gratitude—the love that I craved to earn, not for my money, not for my kindness, but for myself. I heard that Nelly had met with a place in Bolland; and I could see no reason why I might not speak to her once before she left our neighbourhood. I meant it to be a quiet friendly telling her of my sympathy in her sorrow. I felt I could command myself. So, on the Sunday before she was to leave Sawley, I waited near the wood-path by which I knew that she would return from afternoon church. The birds made such a melodious warble, such a busy sound among the leaves, that I did not hear approaching footsteps till they were close at hand, and then there were sounds of two persons' voices. The wood was near that part of Sawley where Nelly was staying with friends; the path through it led to their house, and theirs only, so I knew it must be she, for I had watched her setting out to church alone.

But who was the other?

The blood went to my heart and head, as if I were shot, when I saw that it was Dick Jackson. Was this the end of it all? In the steps of sin which my father had trod, I would rush to my death and my doom. Even where I stood I longed for a weapon to slay him. How dared he come near my Nelly? She too—I thought her faithless, and forgot how little I had ever been to her in outward action; how few words, and those how uncouth, I had ever spoken to her; and I hated her for a traitress. These feelings passed through me before I could see, my eyes and head were so dizzy and blind. When I looked I saw Dick Jackson holding her hand, and speaking quick and low and thick, as a man speaks in great vehemence. She seemed white and dismayed; but all at once, at some word of his (and what it was she never would tell me), she looked as though she defied a fiend, and wrenched herself out of his grasp. He caught hold of her again, and began once more the thick whisper that I loathed.

I could bear it no longer, nor did I see why I should. I stepped out from behind the tree where I had been lying. When she saw me, she lost her look of one strung up to desperation, and came and clung to me; and I felt like a giant in strength and might. I held her with one arm, but I did not take my eyes off him; I felt as if they blazed down into his soul and scorched him up. He never spoke, but tried to look as though he defied me. At last, his eyes fell before mine; I dared not speak, for the old horrid oaths thronged up to my mouth, and I dreaded giving them way, and terrifying my poor, trembling Nelly.

At last, he made to go past me: I drew her out of the pathway. By instinct she wrapped her garments round her, as if to avoid his accidental touch; and he was stung by this, I suppose—I believe—to the mad, miserable revenge he took. As my back was turned to him, in an endeavour to speak some words to Nelly that might soothe her into calmness, she, who was looking after him, like one fascinated with terror, saw him take a sharp, shaley stone, and aim it at me. Poor darling! she clung round me as a shield, making her sweet body into a defence for mine. It hit her, and she spoke no word, kept back her cry of pain, but fell at my feet in a swoon. He—the coward!—ran off as soon as he saw what he had done. I was with Nelly alone in the green gloom of the wood. The quivering and leaf-tinted light made her look as if she were dead. I carried her, not knowing if I bore a corpse or not, to her friend's house. I did not stay to explain, but ran madly for the doctor.

Well! I cannot bear to recur to that time again. Five weeks I lived in the agony of suspense; from which my only relief was in laying savage plans for revenge. If I hated him before, what think ye I did now? It seemed as if earth could not hold us twain, but that one of us must go down to Gehenna. I could have killed him; and would have done it without a scruple, but that seemed too poor and bold a revenge. At length—oh, the weary waiting!—oh, the sickening of my heart!—Nelly grew better; as well as she was ever to grow. The bright colour had left her cheek; the mouth quivered with repressed pain, the eyes were dim with tears that agony had forced into them; and I loved her a thousand times better and more than when she was bright and bloom-

ing! What was best of all, I began to perceive that she cared for me. I know her grandmother's friends warned her against me, and told her I came of a bad stock; but she had passed the point where remonstrance from bystanders can take effect—she loved me as I was, a strange mixture of bad and good, all unworthy of her. We spoke together now, as those do whose lives are bound up in each other. I told her I would marry her as soon as she had recovered her health. Her friends shook their heads; but they saw she would be unfit for farm-service or heavy work, and they perhaps thought, as many a one does, that a bad husband was better than none at all. Anyhow, we were married; and I learnt to bless God for my happiness so far beyond my deserts. I kept her like a lady. I was a skilful workman, and earned good wages; and every want she had I tried to gratify. Her wishes were few and simple enough, poor Nelly! If they had been ever so fanciful, I should have had my reward in the new feeling of the holiness of home. She could lead me as a little child with the charm of her gentle voice, and her ever-kind words. She would plead for all when I was full of anger and passion; only Dick Jackson's name passed never between our lips during all that time. In the evening she lay back in her beehive chair, and read to me. I think I see her now, pale and weak, with her sweet young face lighted by her holy, earnest eyes, telling me of the Saviour's life and death, till they were filled with tears. I longed to have been there, to have avenged Him on the wicked Jews. I liked Peter the best of all the disciples. But I got the Bible myself, and read the mighty act of God's vengeance, in the Old Testament, with a kind of triumphant faith that, sooner or later, He would take my cause in hand, and revenge me on mine enemy.

In a year or so, Nelly had a baby—a little girl with eyes just like hers, that looked, with a grave openness, right into yours. Nelly recovered but slowly. It was just before winter, the cotton-crop had failed, and master had to turn off many hands. I thought I was sure of being kept on, for I had earned a steady character, and did my work well; but once again it was permitted that Dick Jackson should do me wrong. He induced his father to dismiss me among the first in my branch of the business; and there

was I, just before winter set in, with a wife and new-born child, and a small enough store of money to keep body and soul together till I could get to work again. All my savings had gone by Christmas Eve, and we sat in the house foodless for the morrow's festival. Nelly looked pinched and worn; the baby cried for a larger supply of milk than its poor starving mother could give it. My right hand had not forgot its cunning, and I went out once more to my poaching. I knew where the gang met; and I knew what a welcome back I should have—a far warmer and more hearty welcome than good men had given me when I tried to enter their ranks. On the road to the meeting-place I fell in with an old man, one who had been a companion to my father in his early days.

"What, lad!" said he, "art thou turning back to the old trade? It's the better business, now that cotton has failed."

"Ay," said I, "cotton is starving us outright. A man may bear a deal himself, but he'll do aught bad and sinful to save his wife and child."

"Nay, lad," said he, "poaching is not sinful; it goes against man's laws, but not against God's."

I was too weak to argue or talk much. I had not tasted food for two days. But I murmured, "At any rate, I trusted to have been clear of it for the rest of my days. It led my father wrong at first. I have tried and I have striven. Now I give all up. Right or wrong shall be the same to me. Some are fore-doomed; and so am I." And, as I spoke, some notion of the futurity that would separate Nelly, the pure and holy, from me, the reckless and desperate one, came over me with an irrepressible burst of anguish. Just then the bells of Bolton-in-Bolland struck up a glad peal, which came over the woods, in the solemn midnight air, like the sons of the morning shouting for joy—they seemed so clear and jubilant. It was Christmas Day: and I felt like an outcast from the gladness and the salvation. Old Jonah spoke out:

"Yon's the Christmas bells. I say, Johnny, my lad, I've no notion of taking such a spiritless chap as thou into the thick of it, with thy rights and thy wrongs. We don't trouble ourselves with such fine lawyer's stuff, and we bring down the 'varmint' all the better. Now, I'll not have thee in our gang, for thou art not up to the fun, and thou'd hang fire when the time came

to be doing. But I've a shrewd guess that plaguey wife and child of thine are at the bottom of thy half-and-half joining. Now, I was thy father's friend afore he took to them helter-skelter ways, and I've five shillings and a neck of mutton at thy service. I'll not list a fasting man; but if thou'lt come to us with a full stomach, and say, 'I like your life, my lads, and I'll make one of you with pleasure, the first shiny night, why, we'll give you a welcome and a half; but, to-night, make no more ado, but turn back with me for the mutton and the money.'

I was not proud: nay, I was most thankful. I took the meat, and boiled some broth for my poor Nelly. She was in a sleep, or a faint, I know not which; but I roused her, and held her up in bed, and fed her with a teaspoon, and the light came back to her eyes, and the faint, moonlight smile to her lips; and when she had ended, she said her innocent grace, and fell asleep, with her baby on her breast. I sat over the fire, and listened to the bells, as they swept past my cottage on the gusts of the wind. I longed and yearned for the second coming of Christ, of which Nelly had told me. The world seemed cruel, and hard, and strong—too strong for me; and I prayed to cling to the hem of His garment, and be borne over the rough places when I fainted and bled, and found no man to pity or help me, but poor old Jonah, the publican and sinner. All this time my own woes and my own self were uppermost in my mind, as they are in the minds of most who have been hardly used. As I thought of my wrongs, and my sufferings, my heart burned against Dick Jackson; and as the bells rose and fell, so my hopes waxed and waned, that in those mysterious days, of which they were both the remembrance and the prophecy, he would be purged from off the earth. I took Nelly's Bible, and turned, not to the gracious story of the Saviour's birth, but to the records of the former days, when the Jews took such wild revenge upon all their opponents. I was a Jew—a leader among the people. Dick Jackson was as Pharaoh, as the King Agag, who walked delicately, thinking the bitterness of death was past—in short, he was the conquered enemy, over whom I gloated, with my Bible in my hand—that Bible which contained our Saviour's words on the Cross. As yet, those words seemed faint and meaningless to me, like a tract of country seen in the starlight haze; while

the histories of the Old Testament were grand and distinct in the blood-red colour of sunset. By-and-by that night passed into day, and little piping voices came round, carol-singing. They wakened Nelly. I went to her as soon as I heard her stirring.

"Nelly," said I, "there's money and food in the house ; I will be off to Padiham seeking work, while thou hast something to go upon."

"Not to-day," said she ; "stay to-day with me. If thou wouldst only go to church with me this once"—for you see I had never been inside a church but when we were married, and she was often praying me to go ; and now she looked at me, with a sigh just creeping forth from her lips, as she expected a refusal. But I did not refuse. I had been kept away from church before because I dared not go ; and now I was desperate, and dared do anything. If I did look like a heathen in the face of all men, why, I was a heathen in my heart, for I was falling back into all my evil ways. I had resolved, if my search of work at Padiham should fail, I would follow my father's footsteps, and take with my own right hand and by my strength of arm what it was denied me to obtain honestly. I had resolved to leave Sawley, where a curse seemed to hang over me : so what did it matter if I went to church, all unbeknowing what strange ceremonies were there performed ? I walked thither as a sinful man—sinful in my heart. Nelly hung on my arm, but even she could not get me to speak. I went in ; she found my places, and pointed to the words, and looked up into my eyes with hers, so full of faith and joy. But I saw nothing but Richard Jackson—I heard nothing but his loud nasal voice, making response, and desecrating all the holy words. He was in broadcloth of the best—I in my fustian jacket. He was prosperous and glad—I was starving and desperate. Nelly grew pale, as she saw the expression in my eyes ; and she prayed ever and ever more fervently as the thought of me tempted by the Devil even at that very moment came more fully before her.

By-and-by she forgot even me, and laid her soul bare before God, in a long, silent, weeping prayer, before we left the church. Nearly all had gone ; and I stood by her, unwilling to disturb her, unable to join her. At last she rose up, heavenly calm. She took my arm, and we went home through the woods, where

all the birds seemed tame and familiar. Nelly said she thought all living creatures knew it was Christmas Day, and rejoiced, and were loving together. I believed it was the frost that had tamed them ; and I felt the hatred that was in me, and knew that whatever else was loving, I was full of malice and uncharitableness ; nor did I wish to be otherwise. That afternoon I bade Nelly and our child farewell, and tramped to Padiham. I got work—how I hardly know ; for stronger and stronger came the force of the temptation to lead a wild, free life of sin ; legions seemed whispering evil thoughts to me, and only my gentle, pleading Nelly to pull me back from the great gulf. However, as I said before, I got work, and set off homewards to move my wife and child to that neighbourhood. I hated Sawley, and yet I was fiercely indignant to leave it, with my purposes unaccomplished. I was still an outcast from the more respectable, who stood afar off from such as I ; and mine enemy lived and flourished in their regard. Padiham, however, was not so far away for me to despair—to relinquish my fixed determination. It was on the eastern side of the great Pendle Hill, ten miles away, maybe. Hate will overleap a greater obstacle. I took a cottage on the Fell, high up on the side of the hill. We saw a long black moorland slope before us, and then the grey stone houses of Padiham, over which a black cloud hung, different from the blue wood or turf smoke about Sawley. The wild winds came down and whistled round our house many a day when all was still below. But I was happy then. I rose in men's esteem. I had work in plenty. Our child lived and thrived. But I forgot not our country proverb—"Keep a stone in thy pocket for seven years : turn it, and keep it seven years more ; but have it ever ready to cast at thine enemy when the time comes."

One day a fellow-workman asked me to go to a hill-side preaching. Now, I never cared to go to church ; but there was something newer and freer in the notion of praying to God right under His great dome ; and the open air had had a charm to me ever since my wild boyhood. Besides, they said, these ranters had strange ways with them, and I thought it would be fun to see their way of setting about it ; and this ranter of all others had made himself a name in our parts. Accordingly we went ; it was a fine summer's evening, after work was done. When we got to the place we saw such a crowd as I never saw

before—men, women, and children ; all ages were gathered together, and sat on the hill-side. They were careworn, diseased, sorrowful, criminal ; all that was told on their faces, which were hard and strongly marked. In the midst, standing in a cart, was the ranter. When I first saw him, I said to my companion, “ Lord ! what a little man to make all this pother ! I could trip him up with one of my fingers,” and then I sat down, and looked about me a bit. All eyes were fixed on the preacher ; and I turned mine upon him too. He began to speak ; it was in no fine-drawn language, but in words such as we heard every day of our lives, and about things we did every day of our lives. He did not call our shortcomings pride or worldliness, or pleasure-seeking, which would have given us no clear notion of what he meant, but he just told us outright what we did, and then he gave it a name, and said that it was accursed, and that we were lost if we went on so doing.

By this time the tears and sweat were running down his face ; he was wrestling for our souls. We wondered how he knew our innermost lives as he did, for each one of us saw his sin set before him in plain-spoken words. Then he cried out to us to repent ; and spoke first to us, and then to God, in a way that would have shocked many—but it did not shock me. I liked strong things ; and I liked the bare, full truth : and I felt brought nearer to God in that hour—the summer darkness creeping over us, and one after one the stars coming out above us, like the eyes of the angels watching us—than I had ever done in my life before. When he had brought us to our tears and sighs, he stopped his loud voice of upbraiding, and there was a hush, only broken by sobs and quivering moans, in which I heard through the gloom the voices of strong men in anguish and supplication, as well as the shriller tones of women. Suddenly he was heard again ; by this time we could not see him ; but his voice was now tender as the voice of an angel, and he told us of Christ, and implored us to come to Him. I never heard such passionate entreaty. He spoke as if he saw Satan hovering near us in the dark, dense night, and as if our only safety lay in a very present coming to the Cross ; I believe he did see Satan ; we know he haunts the desolate old hills, awaiting his time, and now or never it was with many a soul. At length there was a sudden silence ; and by the cries of those nearest to the preacher, we heard that he had fainted. We had all crowded round him, as if he were our

safety and our guide ; and he was overcome by the heat and the fatigue, for we were the fifth set of people whom he had addressed that day. I left the crowd who were leading him down, and took a lonely path myself.

Here was the earnestness I needed. To this weak and weary fainting man, religion was a life and a passion. I look back now, and wonder at my blindness as to what was the root of all my Nelly's patience and long-suffering ; for I thought now I had found out what religion was, and that hitherto it had been all an unknown thing to me.

Henceforward, my life was changed. I was zealous and fanatical. Beyond the set to whom I had affiliated myself, I had no sympathy. I would have persecuted all who differed from me, if I had only had the power. I became an ascetic in all bodily enjoyments. And, strange and inexplicable mystery, I had some thoughts that by every act of self-denial I was attaining to my unholy end, and that, when I had fasted and prayed long enough, God would place my vengeance in my hands. I have knelt by Nelly's bedside, and vowed to live a self-denying life, as regarded all outward things, if so that God would grant my prayer. I left it in His hands. I felt sure He would trace out the token and the word ; and Nelly would listen to my passionate words, and lie awake sorrowful and heart-sore through the night ; and I would get up and make her tea, and rearrange her pillows, with a strange and wilful blindness that my bitter words and blasphemous prayers had cost her miserable, sleepless nights. My Nelly was suffering yet from that blow. How or where the stone had hurt her, I never understood ; but in consequence of that one moment's action, her limbs became numb and dead, and, by slow degrees, she took to her bed, from whence she was never carried alive. There she lay, propped up by pillows, her meek face ever bright, and smiling forth a greeting ; her white, pale hands ever busy with some kind of work ; and our little Grace was as the power of motion to her. Fierce as I was away from her, I never could speak to her but in my gentlest tones. She seemed to me as if she had never wrestled for salvation as I had ; and when away from her, I resolved many a time and oft, that I would rouse her up to her state of danger when I returned home that evening—even if strong reproach were required I would rouse her up to her soul's need. But I came in and heard her voice

singing softly some holy word of patience, some psalm which, maybe, had comforted the martyrs, and when I saw her face like the face of an angel, full of patience and happy faith, I put off my awakening speeches till another time.

One night, long ago, when I was yet young and strong, although my years were past forty, I sat alone in my house-place. Nelly was always in bed, as I have told you, and Grace lay in a cot by her side. I believed them to be both asleep; though how they could sleep I could not conceive, so wild and terrible was the night. The wind came sweeping down from the hill-top in great beats, like the pulses of heaven; and, during the pauses, while I listened for the coming roar, I felt the earth shiver beneath me. The rain beat against windows and doors, and sobbed for entrance. I thought the Prince of the Air was abroad; and I heard, or fancied I heard, shrieks come on the blast, like the cries of sinful souls given over to his power.

The sounds came nearer and nearer. I got up and saw to the fastenings of the door, for though I cared not for mortal man, I did care for what I believed was surrounding the house, in evil might and power. But the door shook as though it, too, were in deadly terror, and I thought the fastenings would give way. I stood facing the entrance, lashing my heart up to defy the spiritual enemy that I looked to see, every instant, in bodily presence; and the door did burst open, and before me stood—what was it? man or demon? a grey-haired man, with poor, worn clothes all wringing wet, and he himself battered and piteous to look upon, from the storm he had passed through.

“Let me in!” he said. “Give me shelter. I am poor, or I would reward you. And I am friendless, too,” he said, looking up in my face, like one seeking what he cannot find. In that look, strangely changed, I knew that God had heard me; for it was the old cowardly look of my life’s enemy. Had he been a stranger, I might not have welcomed him; but as he was mine enemy, I gave him welcome in a lordly dish. I sat opposite to him. “Whence do you come?” said I. “It is a strange night to be out on the fells.”

He looked up at me sharp; but in general he held his head down like a beast or hound.

“You won’t betray me. I’ll not trouble you long. As soon as the storm abates, I’ll go.”

"Friend," said I, "what have I to betray?" and I trembled lest he should keep himself out of my power and not tell me. "You come for shelter, and I give you of my best. Why do you suspect me?"

"Because," said he, in his abject bitterness, "all the world is against me. I never met with goodness or kindness; and now I am hunted like a wild beast. I'll tell you—I'm a convict returned before my time. I was a Sawley man" (as if I, of all men, did not know it!), "and I went back, like a fool, to the old place. They've hunted me out where I would fain have lived rightly and quietly, and they'll send me back to that hell upon earth, if they catch me. I did not know it would be such a night. Only let me rest and get warm once more, and I'll go away. Good, kind man, have pity upon me!" I smiled all his doubts away; I promised him a bed on the floor, and I thought of Jael and Sisera. My heart leaped up like a war-horse at the sound of the trumpet, and said, "Ha, ha, the Lord hath heard my prayer and supplication; I shall have vengeance at last!"

He did not dream who I was. He was changed; so that I, who had learned his features with all the diligence of hatred, did not, at first, recognise him; and he thought not of me, only of his own woe and affright. He looked into the fire with the dreamy gaze of one whose strength of character, if he had any, is beaten out of him, and cannot return at any emergency whatsoever. He sighed and pitied himself, yet could not decide on what to do. I went softly about my business, which was to make him up a bed on the floor, and, when he was lulled to sleep and security, to make the best of my way to Padiham, and summon the constable, into whose hands I would give him up, to be taken back to his "hell upon earth." I went into Nelly's room. She was awake and anxious. I saw she had been listening to the voices.

"Who is there?" said she. "John, tell me; it sounded like a voice I knew. For God's sake, speak!"

I smiled a quiet smile. "It is a poor man, who has lost his way. Go to sleep, my dear—I shall make him up on the floor. I may not come for some time. Go to sleep;" and I kissed her. I thought she was soothed, but not fully satisfied. However, I hastened away before there was any further time for questioning. I made up the bed, and Richard Jackson, tired

out, lay down and fell asleep. My contempt for him almost equalled my hate. If I were avoiding return to a place which I thought to be a hell upon earth, think you I would have taken a quiet sleep under any man's roof till, somehow or another, I was secure. Now comes this man, and, with incontinence of tongue, blabs out the very thing he most should conceal, and then lies down to a good, quiet, snoring sleep. I looked again. His face was old, and worn, and miserable. So should mine enemy look. And yet it was sad to gaze upon him, poor, hunted creature!

I would gaze no more, lest I grew weak and pitiful. Thus I took my hat, and softly opened the door. The wind blew in, but did not disturb him, he was so utterly weary. I was out in the open air of night. The storm was ceasing, and, instead of the black sky of doom that I had seen when I last looked forth, the moon was come out, wan and pale, as if wearied with the fight in the heavens, and her white light fell ghostly and calm on many a well-known object. Now and then, a dark, torn cloud was blown across her home in the sky; but they grew fewer and fewer, and at last she shone out steady and clear. I could see Padiham down before me. I heard the noise of the watercourses down the hill-side. My mind was full of one thought, and strained upon that one thought, and yet my senses were most acute and observant. When I came to the brook, it was swollen to a rapid, tossing river; and the little bridge, with its hand-rail, was utterly swept away. It was like the bridge at Sawley, where I had first seen Nelly; and I remembered that day even then in the midst of my vexation at having to go round. I turned away from the brook, and there stood a little figure facing me. No spirit from the dead could have affrighted me as it did; for I saw it was Grace, whom I had left in bed by her mother's side.

She came to me, and took my hand. Her bare feet glittered white in the moonshine, and sprinkled the light upwards, as they plashed through the pool.

"Father," said she, "mother bade me say this." Then, pausing to gather breath and memory, she repeated these words like a lesson of which she feared to forget a syllable—

"Mother says, 'There is a God in heaven; and in His house are many mansions. If you hope to meet her there, you will

come back and speak to her; if you are to be separate for ever and ever, you will go on, and may God have mercy on her and on you!' Father, I have said it right—every word."

I was silent. At last, I said—

"What made mother say this? How came she to send you out?"

"I was asleep, father, and I heard her cry. I wakened up, and I think you had but just left the house, and that she was calling for you. Then she prayed, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and kept saying—'Oh, that I could walk!—oh, that for one hour I could run and walk!' So I said, 'Mother, I can run and walk. Where must I go?' And she clutched at my arm, and bade God bless me, and told me not to fear, for that He would compass me about, and taught me my message: and now, father, dear father, you will meet mother in heaven, won't you, and not be separate for ever and ever?" She clung to my knees, and pleaded once more in her mother's words. I took her up in my arms, and turned homewards.

"Is yon man there, on the kitchen floor?" asked I.

"Yes!" she answered. At any rate, my vengeance was not out of my power yet.

When we got home I passed him, dead asleep.

In our room, to which my child guided me, was Nelly. She sat up in bed, a most unusual attitude for her, and one of which I thought she had been incapable of attaining to without help. She had her hands clasped, and her face rapt, as if in prayer: and when she saw me, she lay back with a sweet ineffable smile. She could not speak at first; but when I came near, she took my hand and kissed it; and then she called Grace to her, and made her take off her cloak and her wet things, and dressed in her short scanty night-gown, she slipped in to her mother's warm side; and all this time my Nelly never told me why she summoned me: it seemed enough that she should hold my hand, and feel that I was there. I believe she had read my heart; and yet I durst not speak to ask her. At last, she looked up. "My husband," said she, "God has saved you and me from a great sorrow this night." I would not understand, and I felt her look die away into disappointment.

"That poor wanderer in the house-place is Richard Jackson, is it not?"

I made no answer. Her face grew white and wan.

"Oh," said she, "this is hard to bear. Speak what is in your mind, I beg of you. I will not thwart you harshly; dearest John, only speak to me."

"Why need I speak? You seem to know all."

"I do know that his is a voice I can never forget; and I do know the awful prayers you have prayed, and I know how I have lain awake, to pray that your words might never be heard; and I am a powerless cripple. I put my cause in God's hands. You shall not do the man any harm. What you have it in your thoughts to do, I cannot tell. But I know that you cannot do it. My eyes are dim with a strange mist; but some voice tells me that you will forgive even Richard Jackson. Dear husband—dearest John, it is so dark, I cannot see you: but speak once to me."

I moved the candle; but when I saw her face, I saw what was drawing the mist over those loving eyes—how strange and woeful that she could die! Her little girl lying by her side looked in my face, and then at her; and the wild knowledge of death shot through her young heart, and she screamed aloud.

Nelly opened her eyes once more. They fell upon the gaunt, sorrow-worn man who was the cause of all. He roused him from his sleep, at that child's piercing cry, and stood at the doorway, looking in. He knew Nelly, and understood where the storm had driven him to shelter. He came towards her—

"Oh, woman—dying woman—you have haunted me in the loneliness of the Bush far away—you have been in my dreams for ever—the hunting of men has not been so terrible as the hunting of your spirit—that stone—that stone!" He fell down by her bedside in an agony; above which her saint-like face looked on us all, for the last time, glorious with the coming light of heaven. She spoke once again—

"It was a moment of passion; I never bore you malice for it. I forgive you; and so does John, I trust."

Could I keep my purpose there? It faded into nothing. But, above my choking tears, I strove to speak clear and distinct, for her dying ear to hear, and her sinking heart to be gladdened.

"I forgive you, Richard! I will befriend you in your trouble."

She could not see ; but, instead of the dim shadow of death stealing over her face, a quiet light came over it, which we knew was the look of a soul at rest.

That night I listened to his tale for her sake ; and I learned that it is better to be sinned against than to sin. In the storm of the night mine enemy came to me ; in the calm of the grey morning I led him forth, and bade him "God speed." And a woe had come upon me, but the burning burden of a sinful, angry heart was taken off. I am old now, and my daughter is married. I try to go about preaching and teaching in my rough, rude way ; and what I teach is, how Christ lived and died, and what was Nelly's faith of love.



TRAITS AND STORIES OF THE HUGUENOTS.



I HAVE always been interested in the conversation of any one who could tell me anything about the Huguenots ; and, little by little, I have picked up many fragments of information respecting them. I will just recur to the well-known fact, that five years after Henry the Fourth's formal abjuration of the Protestant faith, in fifteen hundred and ninety-three, he secured to the French Protestants their religious liberty by the Edict of Nantes. His unworthy son, however, Louis the Thirteenth, refused them the privileges which had been granted to them by this act ; and, when reminded of the claims they had, if the promises of Henry the Third and Henry the Fourth were to be regarded, he answered that "the first-named monarch feared them, and the latter loved them ; but he neither feared nor loved them." The extermination of the Huguenots was a favourite project with Cardinal Richelieu, and it was at his instigation that the second siege of Rochelle was undertaken—known even to the most careless student of history for the horrors of famine which the besieged endured. Miserably disappointed as they were at the failure of the looked-for assistance from England, the mayor of the town, Guiton, rejected the conditions of peace which Cardinal Richelieu offered ; namely, that they would raze their fortifications to the ground, and suffer the Catholics to enter. But there was a traitorous faction in the town ; and, on Guiton's rejection of the terms, this faction collected in one night a crowd of women, and children, and aged persons, and drove them beyond the lines ; they were useless, and yet they ate food. Driven out from the beloved city, tottering, faint, and weary, they were fired at by the enemy ; and the survivors came plead-

ing back to the walls of Rochelle, pleading for a quiet shelter to die in, even if their death were caused by hunger. When two-thirds of the inhabitants had perished; when the survivors were insufficient to bury their dead; when ghastly corpses outnumbered the living—miserable, glorious Rochelle, stronghold of the Huguenots, opened its gates to receive the Roman Catholic Cardinal, who celebrated mass in the church of St. Marguerite, once the beloved sanctuary of Protestant worship. As we cling to the memory of the dead, so did the Huguenots remember Rochelle. Years—long years of suffering—gone by, a village sprang up, not twenty miles from New York, and the name of that village was New Rochelle; and the old men told with tears of the sufferings their parents had undergone when they were little children, far away across the sea, in the “pleasant” land of France.

Richelieu was otherwise occupied after this second siege of Rochelle, and had to put his schemes for the extermination of the Huguenots on one side. So they lived in a kind of trembling, uncertain peace during the remainder of the reign of Louis the Thirteenth. But they strove to avert persecution by untiring submission. It was not until sixteen hundred and eighty-three that the Huguenots of the south of France resolved to profess their religion, and refuse any longer to be registered among those of the Roman Catholic faith; to be martyrs rather than apostates or hypocrites. On an appointed Sabbath, the old deserted Huguenot churches were re-opened; nay, those in ruins, of which but a few stones remained to tell the tale of having once been holy ground, were peopled with attentive hearers, listening to the word of God as preached by reformed ministers. Languedoc, Cevennes, Dauphiny, seemed alive with Huguenots—even as the Highlands were, at the chieftain’s call, alive with armed men, whose tartans had been hidden but a moment before in the harmonious and blending colours of the heather.

Dragonnades took place, and cruelties were perpetrated which it is as well, for the honour of human nature, should be forgotten. Twenty-four thousand conversions were announced to Le Grand Louis, who fully believed in them. The more far-seeing Madame de Maintenon hinted at her doubts in the famous speech, “Even if the fathers are hypocrites, the children will be Catholics.”

And then came the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. A multitude of weak reasons were alleged, as is generally the case where there is not one that is really good, or presentable; such as that the Edict was never meant to be perpetual; that (by the blessing of Heaven and the dragonnades) the Huguenots had returned to the true faith, therefore the Edict was useless—a mere matter of form, &c. &c.

As a "mere matter of form," some penalties were decreed against the professors of the extinct heresy. Every Huguenot place of worship was to be destroyed; every minister who refused to conform was to be sent to the Hôpitaux de Forçats at Marseilles and at Valence. If he had been noted for his zeal he was to be considered "obstinate," and sent to slavery for life in such of the West-Indian islands as belonged to the French. The children of Huguenot parents were to be taken from them by force, and educated by the Roman Catholic monks or nuns. These are but a few of the enactments contained in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

And now come in some of the traditions which I have heard and collected.

A friend of mine, a descendant from some of the Huguenots who succeeded in emigrating to England, has told me the following particulars of her great-great-grandmother's escape. This lady's father was a Norman farmer, or rather small landed proprietor. His name was Lefebvre; he had two sons, grown men, stout and true; able to protect themselves, and choose their own line of conduct. But he had also one little daughter, Magdalen, the child of his old age, and the darling of his house, keeping it alive and glad with her innocent prattle. His small estate was far away from any large town, with its corn-fields and orchards surrounding the old ancestral house. There was plenty always in it; and though the wife was an invalid, there was always a sober cheerfulness present, to give a charm to the abundance.

The family Lefebvre lived almost entirely on the produce of the estate, and had little need for much communication with their nearest neighbours, with whom, however, as kindly well-meaning people, they were on good terms, although they differed in their religion. In those days, coffee was scarcely known, even in large cities; honey supplied the place of sugar; and for the pottage, the *bouilli*, the vegetables, the salad, the fruit, the

garden, farm, and orchards of the Lefebvres was all-sufficient. The woollen cloth was spun by the men of the house on winter's evenings, standing by the great wheel, and carefully and slowly turning it to secure evenness of thread. The women took charge of the linen, gathering and drying, and beating the bad-smelling hemp, the ugliest crop that grew about the farm; and reserving the delicate blue-flowered flax for the fine thread needed for the daughter's *trousseau*; for as soon as a woman-child was born, the mother, lying too faint to work, smiled as she planned the web of dainty linen, which was to be woven at Rouen, out of the flaxen thread of gossamer fineness, to be spun by no hand, as you may guess, but that mother's own. And the farm maidens took pride in the store of sheets and table napery which they were to have a share in preparing for the future wedding of the little baby, sleeping serene in her warm cot by her mother's side. Such being the self-sufficient habits of the Norman farmers, it was no wonder that, in the eventful year of sixteen hundred and eighty-five, Lefebvre remained ignorant for many days of that Revocation which was stirring the whole souls of his co-religionists. But there was to be a cattle fair at Avranches, and he needed a barren cow to fatten up and salt for the winter's provision. Accordingly, the large-boned Norman horse was accoutred, summer as it was, with all its paraphernalia of high-peaked wooden saddle, blue sheep-skin, scarlet worsted fringe and tassels; and the farmer Lefebvre, slightly stiff in his limbs after sixty winters, got on from the horse-block by the stable wall, his little daughter Magdalen nodding and kissing her hand as he rode away. When he arrived at the fair in the great place before the cathedral in Avranches, he was struck with the absence of many of those who were united to him by the bond of their common persecuted religion; and on the faces of the Huguenot farmers who were there was an expression of gloom and sadness. In answer to his inquiries, he learnt for the first time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He and his sons could sacrifice anything—would be proud of martyrdom, if need were—but the clause which cut him to the heart was that which threatened that his pretty, innocent sweet Magdalen might be taken from him and consigned to the teachings of a convent. A convent, to the Huguenots' excited prejudices, implied a place of dissolute morals, as well as of idolatrous doctrine.

Poor Farmer Lefebvre thought no more of the cow he went to purchase; the life and death—nay, the salvation or damnation—of his darling seemed to him to depend on the speed with which he could reach his home, and take measures for her safety. What these were to be he could not tell in this moment of bewildered terror; for, even while he watched the stable-boy at the inn arranging his horse's gear, without daring to help him, for fear his early departure and undue haste might excite suspicion in the malignant faces he saw gathering about him—even while he trembled with impatience, his daughter might be carried away out of his sight for ever and ever. He mounted and spurred the old horse; but the road was hilly, and the steed had not had his accustomed rest, and was poorly fed, according to the habit of the country; and, at last, he almost stood still at the foot of every piece of rising ground. Farmer Lefebvre dismounted, and ran by the horse's side up every hill, pulling him along, and encouraging his flagging speed by every conceivable noise, meant to be cheerful, though the tears were fast running down the old man's cheeks. He was almost sick with the revulsion of his fears, when he saw Magdalen sitting out in the sun, playing with the "fromages" of the mallow-plant, which are such a delight to Norman children. He got off his horse, which found its accustomed way into the stable. He kissed Magdalen over and over again, the tears coming down his cheeks like rain. And then he went in to tell his wife—his poor invalid wife. She received the news more tranquilly than he had done. Long illness had deadened the joys and fears of this world to her. She could even think and suggest. "That night a fishing-smack was to sail from Granville to the Channel Islands. Some of the people, who had called at the Lefebvre farm on their way to Avranches, had told her of ventures they were making, in sending over apples and pears to be sold in Jersey, where the orchard crops had failed. The captain was a friend of one of her absent sons: for his sake"—

"But we must part from *her*—from Magdalen, the apple of our eyes. And she—she has never left her home before, never been away from us—who will take care of her? Marie, I say, who is to take care of the precious child?" And the old man was choked with his sobs. Then his wife made answer, and said—

"God will take care of our precious child, and keep her safe

from harm, till we two—or you, at least, dear husband—can leave this accursed land. Or, if we cannot follow her, she will be safe for heaven ; whereas if she stays here to be taken to the terrible convent, hell will be her portion, and we shall never see her again—never !”

So they were stilled by their faith into sufficient composure to plan for the little girl. The old horse was again to be harnessed and put into the cart, and if any spying Romanist looked into the cart, what would they see but straw and a new mattress rolled up, and peeping out of a sackcloth covering. The mother blessed her child, with a full conviction that she should never see her again. The father went with her to Granville. On the way the only relief he had was caring for her comfort in her strange imprisonment. He stroked her cheeks and smoothed her hair with his labour-hardened fingers, and coaxed her to eat the food her mother had prepared. In the evening her feet were cold ; he took off his warm flannel jacket to wrap them in. Whether it was that chill coming on the heat of the excited day, or whether the fatigue and grief broke down the old man utterly, no one can say. The child Magdalen was safely extricated from her hiding-place at the Quai at Granville, and smuggled on board of the fishing-smack, with her great chest of clothes and half-collected *trousseau* ; the captain took her safe to Jersey, and willing friends received her eventually in London. But the father—moaning to himself, “If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved,” saying that pitiful sentence over and over again, as if the repetition could charm away the deep sense of woe—went home, and took to his bed and died ; nor did the mother remain long after him.

One of these Lefebvre sons was the grandfather of the Duke of Dantzic, one of Napoleon's marshals. The little daughter's descendants, though not very numerous, are scattered over England, and one of them, as I have said, is the lady who told me this, and many other particulars relating to the exiled Huguenots.

At first the rigorous decrees of the Revocation were principally enforced against the ministers of religion. They were all required to leave Paris at forty-eight hours' notice, under severe penalties for disobedience. Some of the most distinguished among them were ignominiously forced to leave the country ; but the expulsion of these ministers was followed by the emigra-

tion of the more faithful among their people. In Languedoc this was especially the case; whole congregations followed their pastors; and France was being rapidly drained of the more thoughtful and intelligent of the Huguenots (who, as a people, had distinguished themselves in manufacture and commerce), when the king's minister took the alarm, and prohibited emigration, under pain of imprisonment for life; imprisonment for life including abandonment to the tender mercies of the priests. Here again I may relate an anecdote told me by my friend:—A husband and wife attempted to escape separately from some town in Brittany; the wife succeeded and reached England, where she anxiously awaited her husband. The husband was arrested in the attempt, and imprisoned. The priest alone was allowed to visit him; and after vainly using argument to endeavour to persuade him to renounce his obnoxious religion, the priest, with cruel zeal, had recourse to physical torture. There was a room in the prison with an iron floor, and no seat, nor means of support or rest; into this room the poor Huguenot was introduced. The iron flooring was gradually heated (one remembers the gouty gentleman whose cure was effected by a similar process in "Sandford and Merton;" but there the heat was not carried up to torture, as it was in the Huguenot's case); still the brave man was faithful. The process was repeated; all in vain. The flesh on the soles of his feet was burnt off, and he was a cripple for life; but cripple or sound, dead or alive, a Huguenot he remained. And by-and-by they grew weary of their useless cruelty, and the poor man was allowed to hobble about on crutches. How it was that he obtained his liberty at last, my informant could not tell. He only knew that, after years of imprisonment and torture, a poor grey cripple was seen wandering about the streets of London, making vain inquiries for his wife in his broken English, as little understood by most as the Moorish maiden's cry for "Gilbert, Gilbert." Some one at last directed him to a coffee-house near Soho Square, kept by an emigrant, who thrived upon the art, even then national, of making good coffee. It was the resort of the Huguenots, many of whom by this time had turned their intelligence to good account in busy, commercial England.

To this coffee-house the poor cripple hid himself; but no one knew of his wife; she might be alive, or she might be dead; it seemed as if her name had vanished from the earth. In the

corner sat a pedlar, listening to everything but saying nothing. He had come to London to lay in a stock of wares for his rounds. Now the three harbours of the French emigrants were Norwich, where they established the manufacture of Norwich crape; Spitalfields, in London, where they embarked in the silk trade; and Canterbury, where a colony of them carried on one or two delicate employments, such as jewellery, wax-bleaching, &c. The pedlar took Canterbury in his way, and sought among the French residents for a woman who might correspond to the missing wife. She was there, earning her livelihood as a milliner, and believing her husband to be either a galley-slave, or dead long since in some of the terrible prisons. But, on hearing the pedlar's tale, she set off at once to London, and found her poor crippled husband, who lived many years afterwards in Canterbury, supported by his wife's exertions.

Another Huguenot couple determined to emigrate. They could disguise themselves; but their baby? If they were seen passing through the gates of the town in which they lived, with a child, they would instantly be arrested, suspected Huguenots as they were. Their expedient was to wrap the baby into a formless bundle, to one end of which was attached a string; and then, taking advantage of the deep gutter which runs in the centre of so many old streets in French towns, they placed the baby in this hollow, close to one of the gates, after dusk. The gendarme came out to open the gate to them. They were suddenly summoned to see a sick relation, they said; they were known to have an infant child, which no Huguenot mother would willingly leave behind to be brought up by Papists. So the sentinel concluded that they were not going to emigrate, at least this time, and locking the great town-gates behind them, he re-entered his little guard-room. "Now quick! quick! the string under the gate! Catch it with your hook stick! There, in the shadow! There! Thank God! the baby is safe; it has not cried! Pray God the sleeping draught be not too strong!" It was not too strong. Father, mother, and babe escaped to England, and their descendants may be reading this very paper.

England, Holland, and the Protestant states of Germany were the places of refuge for the Norman and Breton Protestants. From the south of France escape was more difficult. Algerine pirates infested the Mediterranean, and the small vessels in

which many of the Huguenots embarked from the southern ports were an easy prey. There were Huguenot slaves in Algiers and Tripoli for years after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Most Catholic Spain caught some of the fugitives, who were welcomed by the Spanish Inquisition with a different kind of greeting from that which the wise, far-seeing William the Third of England bestowed on such of them as sought English shelter after his accession. We will return to the condition of the English Huguenots presently. First, let us follow the fortunes of those French Protestants who sent a letter to the State of Massachusetts (among whose historical papers it is still extant) giving an account of the persecutions to which they were exposed, and the distress they were undergoing, stating the wish of many of them to emigrate to America, and asking how far they might have privileges allowed them for following out their pursuit of agriculture. What answer was returned may be guessed from the fact that a tract of land comprising about eleven thousand acres at Oxford, near the present town of Worcester, Massachusetts, was granted to thirty Huguenots, who were invited to come over and settle there. The invitation came like a sudden summons to a land of hope across the Atlantic. There was no time for preparations; these might excite suspicion; they left the "pot boiling on the fire" (to use the expression of one of their descendants), and carried no clothes with them but what they wore. The New Englanders had too lately escaped from religious persecution themselves not to welcome and shelter and clothe these poor refugees when they once arrived at Boston. The little French colony at Oxford was called a plantation, and Gabriel Bernon, a descendant of a knightly name in Froissart, a Protestant merchant of Rochelle, was appointed undertaker for this settlement. They sent for a French Protestant minister, and assigned to him a salary of forty pounds a year. They bent themselves assiduously to the task of cultivating the half-cleared land, on the borders of which lay the dark forest, among which the Indians prowled and lurked ready to spring upon the unguarded households. To protect themselves from this creeping, deadly enemy the French built a fort, traces of which yet remain. But on the murder of the Johnson family the French dared no longer remain on the bloody spot, although more than ten acres of ground were in garden cultivation

around the fort; and long afterwards, those who told in hushed, awe-struck voices of the Johnson murder, could point to the rose-bushes, the apple and pear trees yet standing in the Frenchmen's deserted gardens. Mrs. Johnson was a sister of Andrew Sigourney, one of the first Huguenots who came over. He saved his sister's life by dragging her by main force through a back door, while the Indians massacred her children, and shot down her husband at his own threshold. To preserve her life was but a cruel kindness.

Gabriel Bernon lived to a patriarchal age, in spite of his early sufferings in France and the wild Indian cries of revenge around his home in Massachusetts. He died rich and prosperous. He had kissed Queen Anne's hand, and become intimate with some of the English nobility, such as Lord Archdale, the Quaker Governor of Carolina, who had lands and governments in the American States. The descendants of the Huguenot refugees repaid in part their debt of gratitude to Massachusetts in various ways during the War of Independence; one, Gabriel Manigault, by advancing a large loan to further the objects of it. Indeed, three of the nine presidents of the old Congress which conducted the United States through the revolutionary war were descendants of the French Protestant refugees. General Francis Marion, who fought bravely under Washington, was of Huguenot descent. In fact, both in England and France, the Huguenot refugees showed themselves temperate, industrious, thoughtful, and intelligent people, full of good principle and strength of character. But all this is implied in the one circumstance that they suffered and emigrated to secure the rights of conscience.

In the State of New York they fondly called their plantation or settlement by the name of the precious city which had been their stronghold, and where they had suffered so much. New Rochelle was built on the shore of Long Island Sound, twenty-three miles from New York. On the Saturday afternoons the inhabitants of New Rochelle harnessed their horses to their carts, to convey the women and little ones, and the men in the prime of life walked all the distance to New York, camping out in their carts in the environs of the city through the night, till the bell summoned them on Sunday morning to service in the old Church du Saint Esprit. In the same way they returned on Sunday evening. The old longing for home, recorded in Allan Cunningham's ballad—

"It's hame, and it's hame, hame fain would I be;
Oh, hame, hame, hame, to my ain countrie!"—

clung to the breasts, and caused singular melancholy in some of them. There was one old man who went every day down to the seashore, to look and gaze his fill towards the beautiful cruel land where most of his life had been passed. With his face to the east—his eyes strained as if by force of longing looks he could see the far-distant France—he said his morning prayers and sang one of Clément Marot's hymns. There had been an edition of the Psalms of David put into French rhyme ("Pseaumes de David, mis en Rime françoise, par Clément Marot et Théodore de Bèze,"), published in as small a form as possible in order that the book might be concealed in their bosoms if the Huguenots were surprised in their worship while they lived in France.

Nor were Oxford and New Rochelle the only settlements of the Huguenots in the United States. Farther south again they were welcomed, and found resting-places in Virginia and South Carolina.

I now return to the Huguenots in England. Even during James the Second's reign, collections were made for the refugees; and, in the reign of his successor, fifteen thousand pounds were voted by Parliament "to be distributed among persons of quality, and all such as, by age or infirmity, were unable to support themselves." There are still, or were, not many years ago, a few survivors of the old Huguenot stock, who go, on quarter-day, to claim their small benefit from this fund at the Treasury; and, doubtless, at the time it was granted there were many friendless and helpless to whom the little pensions were inestimable boons. But the greater part were active, strong men, full of good sense and practical talent; and they preferred taking advantage of the national good-will in a more independent form. Their descendants bear honoured names among us. Sir Samuel Romilly, Mrs. Austin, and Miss Harriet Martineau are three of those that come most prominently before me as I write; but each of these names is suggestive of others in the same families worthy of note. Sir Samuel Romilly's ancestors came from the south of France, where the paternal estate fell to a distant relation rather than to the son, because the former was a Catholic, while the latter had preferred a foreign country with "freedom to worship God." In Sir Samuel Romilly's account of his father and grandfather,

it is easy to detect the southern character predominating. Most affectionate, impulsive, generous, carried away by transports of anger and of grief, tender and true in all his relationships—the reader does not easily forget the father of Sir Samuel Romilly, with his fond adoption of Montaigne's idea, "playing on a flute by the side of his daughter's bed, in order to waken her in the morning." No wonder he himself was so beloved! But there was much more demonstration of affection in all these French households, if what I have gathered from their descendants be correct, than we English should ever dare to manifest.

French was the language still spoken among themselves sixty and seventy years after their ancestors had quitted France. In the Romilly family, the father established it as a rule that French should be always spoken on a Sunday. Forty years later, the lady to whom I have so often alluded was living, an orphan child with two maiden aunts, in the heart of London city. They always spoke French. English was the foreign language; and a certain pride was cultivated in the little damsel's mind by the fact of her being reminded every now and then that she was a little French girl, bound to be polite, gentle, and attentive in manners; to stand till her elders gave her leave to sit down; to curtsy on entering or leaving a room. She attended her relations to the early market near Spitalfields, where many herbs, not in general use in England, and some "weeds," were habitually brought by the market-women for the use of the French people. Burnet, chervil, dandelion, were amongst the number, in order to form the salads which were a principal dish at meals. There were still hereditary schools in the neighbourhood, kept by descendants of the first refugees who established them, and to which the Huguenot families still sent their children. A kind of correspondence was occasionally kept up with the unseen and distant relations in France—third or fourth cousins, it might be. As was to be expected, such correspondence languished and died by slow degrees. But tales of their ancestors' sufferings and escapes beguiled the long winter evenings. Though far away from France, though cast off by her a hundred years before, the gentle old ladies, who had lived all their lives in London, considered France as their country, and England as a strange land. Upstairs, too, was a great chest—the very chest Madame Lefebvre had had packed to accompany her in her flight and escape in the mattress.

The stores her fond mother had provided for her *trousseau* were not yet exhausted, though she slept in her grave; and out of them her little orphan descendant was dressed; and when the quaintness of the pattern made the child shrink from putting on so peculiar a dress, she was asked, "Are you not a little French girl? You ought to be proud of wearing a French print—there are none like it in England." In all this, her relations and their circle seem to have differed from the refugee friends of old Mr. Romilly, who, we are told, "desired nothing less than to preserve the memory of their origin; and their chapels were therefore ill-attended. A large, uncouth room, the avenues to which were narrow courts and dirty alleys, . . . with irregular unpainted pews and dusty unplastered walls; a congregation consisting principally of some strange-looking old women scattered here and there," &c. Probably these old ladies looked strange to the child, who recorded these early impressions in after-life, because they clung with fond pride to the dress of their ancestors, and decked themselves out in the rich grotesque raiment which had formed part of their mother's *trousseau*. At any rate, there certainly was a little colony in the heart of the city, at the end of the last century, who took pride in their descent from the suffering Huguenots, who mustered up relics of the old homes and the old times in Normandy or Languedoc. A sword wielded by some great-grandfather in the wars of the League; a gold whistle, such as hung ever ready at the master's girdle before bells were known in houses, or ready to summon out-of-door labourers; some of the very ornaments sold at the famous curiosity-shop at Warwick for ladies to hang at their *châtelaines*, within this last ten years, were brought over by the flying Huguenots. And there were precious Bibles, secured by silver clasps and corners; strangely-wrought silver spoons, the handle of which enclosed the bowl; a travelling-case, containing a gold knife, spoon, and fork, and a crystal goblet, on which the coat-of-arms was engraved in gold. All these, and many other relics, tell of the affluence and refinement the refugees left behind for the sake of their religion.

There is yet an hospital (or rather great almshouse) for aged people of French descent somewhere near the City Road, which is supported by the proceeds of land bequeathed, I believe, by some of the first refugees, who were prosperous in trade after

settling in England. But it has lost much of its distinctive national character. Fifty or sixty years ago, a visitor might have heard the inmates of this hospital chattering away in antiquated French. Now they speak English, for the majority of their ancestors in four generations have been English, and probably some of them do not know a word of French. Each inmate has a comfortable bedroom, a small annuity for clothes, &c., and sits and has meals in a public dining-room. As a little amusing mark of deference to the land of their founders, I may mention that a Mrs. Stephens, who was admitted within the last thirty years, became Madame St. Etienne as soon as she entered the hospital.

I have now told all I know about the Huguenots. I pass the mark to some one else.



SIX WEEKS AT HEPPENHEIM.

AFTER I left Oxford, I determined to spend some months in travel before settling down in life. My father had left me a few thousands, the income arising from which would be enough to provide for all the necessary requirements of a lawyer's education; such as lodgings in a quiet part of London, fees and payment to the distinguished barrister with whom I was to read; but there would be small surplus left over for luxuries or amusements; and as I was rather in debt on leaving college, since I had forestalled my income, and the expenses of my travelling would have to be defrayed out of my capital, I determined that they should not exceed fifty pounds. As long as that sum would last me I would remain abroad; when it was spent my holiday should be over, and I would return and settle down somewhere in the neighbourhood of Russell Square, in order to be near Mr. —'s chambers in Lincoln's Inn. I had to wait in London for one day while my passport was being made out, and I went to examine the streets in which I purposed to live; I had picked them out, from studying a map, as desirable, and so they were, if judged entirely by my reason; but their aspect was very depressing to one country-bred, and just fresh from the beautiful street-architecture of Oxford. The thought of living in such a monotonous grey district for years made me all the more anxious to prolong my holiday by all the economy which could eke out my fifty pounds. I thought I could make it last for one hundred days at least. I was a good walker, and had no very luxurious tastes in the matter of accommodation or food; I had as fair a knowledge of German and French as any untraveller Englishman can have; and I resolved to avoid expensive hotels such as my own countrymen frequented.

I have stated this much about myself to explain how I fell in with the little story that I am going to record, but with which I had not much to do—my part in it being little more than that of a sympathising spectator. I had been through France into Switzerland, where I had gone beyond my strength in the way of walking, and I was on my way home, when one evening I came to the village of Heppenheim, on the Berg-Strasse. I had strolled about the dirty town of Worms all morning, and dined in a filthy hotel; and after that I had crossed the Rhine, and walked through Lorsch to Heppenheim. I was unnaturally tired and languid as I dragged myself up the rough-paved and irregular village street to the inn recommended to me. It was a large building with a green court before it. A cross-looking but scrupulously clean hostess received me, and showed me into a large room with a dinner-table in it, which, though it might have accommodated thirty or forty guests, only stretched down half the length of the eating-room. There were windows at each end of the room; two looked to the front of the house, on which the evening shadows had already fallen; the opposite two were partly doors, opening into a large garden full of trained fruit trees and beds of vegetables, amongst which rose-bushes and other flowers seemed to grow by permission, not by original intention. There was a stove at each end of the room, which, I suspect, had originally been divided into two. The door by which I had entered was exactly in the middle, and opposite to it was another, leading to a great bed-chamber, which my hostess showed me as my sleeping quarters for the night.

If the place had been much less clean and inviting, I should have remained there; I was almost surprised myself at my *vis inertiae*; once seated in the last warm rays of the slanting sun by the garden window, I was disinclined to move, or even to speak. My hostess had taken my orders as to my evening meal, and had left me. The sun went down, and I grew shivery. The vast room looked cold and bare; the darkness brought out shadows that perplexed me, because I could not fully make out the objects that produced them after dazzling my eyes by gazing out into the crimson light.

Some one came in; it was the maiden to prepare for my supper. She began to lay the cloth at one end of the large table. There was a smaller one close by me. I mustered up

my voice, which seemed a little as if it were getting beyond my control, and called to her—

“Will you let me have my supper here on this table?”

She came near; the light fell on her while I was in shadow. She was a tall young woman, with a fine strong figure, a pleasant face, expressive of goodness and sense, and with a good deal of comeliness about it too, although the fair complexion was bronzed and reddened by weather, so as to have lost much of its delicacy, and the features, as I had afterwards opportunity enough of observing, were anything but regular. She had white teeth, however, and well-opened blue eyes—grave-looking eyes which had shed tears for past sorrow—plenty of light-brown hair, rather elaborately plaited, and fastened up by two great silver pins. That was all—perhaps more than all—I noticed that first night. She began to lay the cloth where I had directed. A shiver passed over me; she looked at me, and then said—

“The gentleman is cold; shall I light the stove?”

Something vexed me—I am not usually so impatient: it was the coming on of serious illness—I did not like to be noticed so closely; I believed that food would restore me, and I did not want to have my meal delayed, as I feared it might be by the lighting of the stove: and most of all I was feverishly annoyed by movement. I answered sharply and abruptly—

“No; bring supper quickly; that is all I want.”

Her quiet, sad eyes met mine for a moment; but I saw no change in their expression, as if I had vexed her by my rudeness: her countenance did not for an instant lose its look of patient sense, and that is pretty nearly all I can remember of Thekla that first evening at Heppenheim.

I suppose I ate my supper, or tried to do so, at any rate; and I must have gone to bed, for days after I became conscious of lying there, weak as a new-born babe, and with a sense of past pain in all my weary limbs. As is the case in recovering from fever, one does not care to connect facts, much less to reason upon them; so how I came to be lying in that strange bed, in that large, half-furnished room, in what house that room was, in what town, in what country, I did not take the trouble to recall. It was of much more consequence to me then to discover what was the well-known herb that gave the scent to the clean, coarse sheets in which I lay. Gradually I extended my observa-

tions, always confining myself to the present. I must have been well cared for by some one, and that lately too, for the window was shaded, so as to prevent the morning sun from coming in upon the bed; there was the crackling of fresh wood in the great white china stove, which must have been newly replenished within a short time.

By-and-by the door opened slowly. I cannot tell why, but my impulse was to shut my eyes as if I were still asleep. But I could see through my apparently closed eyelids. In came, walking on tip-toe, with a slow care that defeated its object, two men. The first was aged from thirty to forty, in the dress of a Black Forest peasant—old-fashioned coat and knee-breeches of strong blue cloth, but of a thoroughly good quality; he was followed by an older man, whose dress, of more pretension as to cut and colour (it was all black), was, nevertheless, as I had often the opportunity of observing afterwards, worn threadbare.

Their first sentences, in whispered German, told me who they were: the landlord of the inn where I was lying a helpless log, and the village doctor who had been called in. The latter felt my pulse, and nodded his head repeatedly in approbation. I had instinctively known that I was getting better, and hardly cared for this confirmation; but it seemed to give the truest pleasure to the landlord, who shook the hand of the doctor in a pantomime expressive of as much thankfulness as if I had been his brother. Some low-spoken remarks were made, and then some question was asked, to which, apparently, my host was unable to reply. He left the room, and in a minute or two returned, followed by Thekla, who was questioned by the doctor, and replied with a quiet clearness, showing how carefully the details of my illness had been observed by her. Then she left the room, and, as if every minute had served to restore to my brain its power of combining facts, I was suddenly prompted to open my eyes, and ask in the best German I could muster what day of the month it was; not that I clearly remembered the date of my arrival at Heppenheim, but I knew it was about the beginning of September.

Again the doctor conveyed his sense of extreme satisfaction in a series of rapid pantomimic nods, and then replied, in deliberate but tolerable English, to my great surprise—

“It is the 29th of September, my dear sir. You must thank the dear God. Your fever has made its course of twenty-one

days. Now patience and care must be practised. The good host and his household will have the care; you must have the patience. If you have relations in England, I will do my endeavours to tell them the state of your health."

"I have no near relations," said I, beginning in my weakness to cry, as I remembered, as if it had been a dream, the days when I had father, mother, sister.

"Chut, chut!" said he; then, turning to the landlord, he told him in German to make Thekla bring me one of her good bouillons; after which I was to have certain medicines, and to sleep as undisturbedly as possible. For days, he went on, I should require constant watching and careful feeding; every twenty minutes I was to have something, either wine or soup, in small quantities.

A dim notion came into my hazy mind that my previous husbandry of my fifty pounds, by taking long walks and scanty diet, would prove in the end very bad economy; but I sank into dozing unconsciousness before I could quite follow out my idea. I was roused by the touch of a spoon on my lips; it was Thekla feeding me. Her sweet, grave face had something approaching to a mother's look of tenderness upon it, as she gave me spoonful after spoonful with gentle patience and dainty care: and then I fell asleep once more. When next I wakened it was night; the stove was lighted, and the burning wood made a pleasant crackle, though I could only see the outlines and edges of red flame through the crevices of the small iron door. The uncurtained window on my left looked into the purple solemn night. Turning a little, I saw Thekla sitting near a table, sewing diligently at some great white piece of household work. Every now and then she stopped to snuff the candle; sometimes she began to ply her needle again immediately; but once or twice she let her busy hands lie idly in her lap, and looked into the darkness, and thought deeply for a moment or two; these pauses always ended in a kind of sobbing sigh, the sound of which seemed to restore her to self-consciousness, and she took to her sewing even more diligently than before. Watching her had a sort of dreamy interest for me; this diligence of hers was a pleasant contrast to my repose; it seemed to enhance the flavour of my rest. I was too much of an animal just then to have my sympathy, or even my curiosity, strongly excited by her look of sad remembrance, or by her sighs.

After a while she gave a little start, looked at a watch lying by her on the table, and came, shading the candle by her hand, softly to my bedside. When she saw my open eyes she went to a porringer placed at the top of the stove, and fed me with soup. She did not speak while doing this. I was half aware that she had done it many times since the doctor's visit, although this seemed to be the first time that I was fully awake. She passed her arm under the pillow on which my head rested, and raised me a very little; her support was as firm as a man's could have been. Again back to her work, and I to my slumbers, without a word being exchanged.

It was broad daylight when I wakened again; I could see the sunny atmosphere of the garden outside stealing in through the nicks at the side of the shawl hung up to darken the room—a shawl which I was sure had not been there when I had observed the window in the night. How gently my nurse must have moved about while doing her thoughtful act!

My breakfast was brought me by the hostess; she who had received me on my first arrival at this hospitable inn. She meant to do everything kindly I am sure; but a sick-room was not her place; by a thousand little mal-adroitesses she fidgeted me past bearing: her shoes creaked, her dress rustled; she asked me questions about myself which it irritated me to answer; she congratulated me on being so much better, while I was faint for want of food which she delayed giving me in order to talk. My host had more sense in him when he came in, although his shoes creaked as well as hers. By this time I was somewhat revived, and could talk a little; besides, it seemed churlish to be longer without acknowledging so much kindness received.

"I am afraid I have been a great trouble," said I. "I can only say that I am truly grateful."

His good, broad face reddened, and he moved a little uneasily.

"I don't see how I could have done otherwise than I—than we did," replied he, in the soft German of the district. "We were all glad enough to do what we could; I don't say it was a pleasure, because it is our busiest time of year—but then," said he, laughing a little awkwardly, as if he feared his expression might have been misunderstood, "I don't suppose it has been a pleasure to you either, sir, to be laid up so far from home."

"No, indeed."

"I may as well tell you now, sir, that we had to look over your papers and clothes. In the first place, when you were so ill I would fain have let your kinsfolk know, if I could have found a clue; and besides, you needed linen."

"I am wearing a shirt of yours, though," said I, touching my sleeve.

"Yes, sir!" said he, again reddening a little. "I told Thekla to take the finest out of the chest; but I am afraid you find it coarser than your own."

For all answer I could only lay my weak hand on the great brown paw resting on the bed-side. He gave me a sudden squeeze in return that I thought would have crushed my bones.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, misinterpreting the sudden look of pain which I could not repress; "but watching a man come out of the shadow of death into life makes one feel very friendly towards him."

"No old or true friend that I have had could have done more for me than you, and your wife, and Thekla, and the good doctor."

"I am a widower," said he, turning round the great wedding-ring that decked his third finger. "My sister keeps house for me, and takes care of the children—that is to say, she does it with the help of Thekla, the house-maiden. But I have other servants," he continued. "I am well-to-do, the good God be thanked! I have land, and cattle, and vineyards. It will soon be our vintage-time, and then you must go and see my grapes as they come into the village. I have a '*chasse*,' too, in the Odenwald; perhaps one day you will be strong enough to go and shoot the '*chevreuil*' with me."

His good, true heart was trying to make me feel like a welcome guest. Some time afterwards I learnt from the doctor that—my poor fifty pounds being nearly all expended—my host and he had been brought to believe in my poverty, as the necessary examination of my clothes and papers showed so little evidence of wealth. But I myself have but little to do with my story; I only name these things, and repeat these conversations, to show what a true, kind, honest man my host was. By the way, I may as well call him by his name henceforward, Fritz Müller. The doctor's name, Wiedermann.

I was tired enough with this interview with Fritz Müller; but when Dr. Wiedermann came he pronounced me to be much

better ; and through the day much the same course was pursued as on the previous one : being fed, lying still, and sleeping, were my passive and active occupations. It was a hot, sunshiny day, and I craved for air. Fresh air does not enter into the pharmacopœia of a German doctor ; but somehow I obtained my wish. During the morning hours the window through which the sun streamed—the window looking on to the front court—was opened a little ; and through it I heard the sounds of active life, which gave me pleasure and interest enough. The hen's cackle, the cock's exultant call when he had found the treasure of a grain of corn, the movements of a tethered donkey, and the cooing and whirring of the pigeons which lighted on the window-sill, gave me just subjects enough for interest. Now and then a cart or carriage drove up—I could hear them ascending the rough village street long before they stopped at the "Halbmond," the village inn. Then there came a sound of running and haste in the house ; and Thekla was always called for in sharp, imperative tones. I heard little children's footsteps, too, from time to time ; and once there must have been some childish accident or hurt, for a shrill, plaintive little voice kept calling out, "Thekla, Thekla, liebe Thekla." Yet, after the first early morning hours, when my hostess attended on my wants, it was always Thekla who came to give me my food or my medicine ; who reddeed up my room ; who arranged the degree of light, shifting the temporary curtain with the shifting sun ; and always as quietly and deliberately as though her attendance upon me were her sole work. Once or twice my hostess came into the large eating-room (out of which my room opened), and called Thekla away from whatever was her occupation in my room at the time, in a sharp, injured, imperative whisper. Once I remember it was to say that sheets were wanted for some stranger's bed, and to ask where she, the speaker, could have put the keys, in a tone of irritation, as though Thekla were responsible for Fräulein Müller's own forgetfulness.

Night came on ; the sounds of daily life died away into silence ; the children's voices were no more heard ; the poultry were all gone to roost ; the beasts of burden to their stables ; and travellers were housed. Then Thekla came in softly and quietly, and took up her appointed place, after she had done all in her power for my comfort. I felt that I was in no

state to be left all those weary hours which intervened between sunset and sunrise; but I did feel ashamed that this young woman, who had watched by me all the previous night, and, for aught I knew, for many before, and had worked hard, been run off her legs, as English servants would say, all day long, should come and take up her care of me again; and it was with a feeling of relief that I saw her head bend forwards, and finally rest on her arms, which had fallen on the white piece of sewing spread before her on the table. She slept; and I slept. When I wakened dawn was stealing into the room, and making pale the lamplight. Thiekla was standing by the stove, where she had been preparing the bouillon I should require on wakening. But she did not notice my half-open eyes, although her face was turned towards the bed. She was reading a letter slowly, as if its words were familiar to her, yet as though she were trying afresh to extract some fuller or some different meaning from their construction. She folded it up softly and slowly, and replaced it in her pocket with the quiet movement habitual to her. Then she looked before her, not at me, but at vacancy filled up by memories; and as the enchanter brought up the scenes and people which she saw, but I could not, her eyes filled with tears—tears that gathered almost imperceptibly to herself as it would seem—for when one large drop fell on her hands (held slightly together before her as she stood) she started a little, and brushed her eyes with the back of her hand, and then came towards the bed to see if I was awake. If I had not witnessed her previous emotion, I could never have guessed that she had any hidden sorrow or pain from her manner, tranquil, self-restrained as usual. The thought of this letter haunted me, especially as more than once I, wakeful or watchful during the ensuing nights, either saw it in her hands, or suspected that she had been recurring to it from noticing the same sorrowful, dreamy look upon her face when she thought herself unobserved. Most likely every one has noticed how inconsistently out of proportion some ideas become when one is shut up in any place without change of scene or thought. I really grew quite irritated about this letter. If I did not see it, I suspected it lay *perdu* in her pocket. What was in it? Of course it was a love-letter; but if so, what was going wrong in the course of her love? I became like a spoilt child in my recovery; every one whom I saw for

the time being was thinking only of me, so it was perhaps no wonder that I became my sole object of thought; and at last the gratification of my curiosity about this letter seemed to me a duty that I owed to myself. As long as my fidgety inquisitiveness remained ungratified, I felt as if I could not get well. But, to do myself justice, it was more than inquisitiveness. Thekla had tended me with the gentle, thoughtful care of a sister, in the midst of her busy life. I could often hear the Fräulein's sharp voice outside blaming her for something that had gone wrong; but I never heard much from Thekla in reply. Her name was called in various tones by different people, more frequently than I could count, as if her services were in perpetual requisition, yet I was never neglected, or even long uncared-for. The doctor was kind and attentive; my host friendly and really generous; his sister subdued her acerbity of manner when in my room; but Thekla was the one of all to whom I owed my comforts, if not my life. If I could do anything to smooth her path (and a little money goes a great way in these primitive parts of Germany), how willingly would I give it? So one night I began—she was no longer needed to watch by my bedside, but she was arranging my room before leaving me for the night—

"Thekla," said I, "you don't belong to Heppenheim, do you?"

She looked at me, and reddened a little.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"You have been so good to me that I cannot help wanting to know more about you. I must needs feel interested in one who has been by my side through my illness as you have. Where do your friends live? Are your parents alive?"

All this time I was driving at the letter.

"I was born at Altenahr. My father is an innkeeper there. He owns the 'Golden Stag.' My mother is dead, and he has married again, and has many children."

"And your stepmother is unkind to you," said I, jumping to a conclusion.

"Who said so?" asked she, with a shade of indignation in her tone. "She is a right good woman, and makes my father a good wife."

"Then why are you here living so far from home?"

Now the look came back to her face which I had seen upon it during the night hours when I had watched her by stealth!

a dimming of the grave frankness of her eyes, a light quiver at the corners of her mouth. But all she said was, "It was better."

Somehow, I persisted with the wilfulness of an invalid. I am half-ashamed of it now.

"But why better, Thekla? Was there"—How should I put it? I stopped a little, and then rushed blindfold at my object: "Has not that letter which you read so often something to do with your being here?"

She fixed me with her serious eyes till I believe I reddened far more than she; and I hastened to pour out, incoherently enough, my conviction that she had some secret care, and my desire to help her if she was in any trouble.

"You cannot help me," said she, a little softened by my explanation, though some shade of resentment at having been thus surreptitiously watched yet lingered in her manner. "It is an old story; a sorrow gone by, past, at least it ought to be, only sometimes I am foolish"—her tones were softening now—"and it is punishment enough that you have seen my folly."

"If you had a brother here, Thekla, you would let him give you his sympathy if he could not give you his help, and you would not blame yourself if you had shown him your sorrow, should you? I tell you again, let me be as a brother to you."

"In the first place, sir"—this "sir" was to mark the distinction between me and the imaginary brother—"I should have been ashamed to have shown even a brother my sorrow, which is also my reproach and my disgrace." These were strong words, and I suppose my face showed that I attributed to them a still stronger meaning than they warranted; but *honi soit qui mal y pense*—for she went on dropping her eyes and speaking hurriedly.

"My shame and my reproach is this: I have loved a man who has not loved me"—she grasped her hands together till the fingers made deep white dents in the rosy flesh—"and I can't make out whether he ever did, or whether he did once and is changed now; if only he did once love me, I could forgive myself."

With hasty, trembling hands she began to re-arrange the tisane and medicines for the night on the little table at my bed-side. But, having got thus far, I was determined to persevere.

"Thekla," said I, "tell me all about it, as you would to your mother, if she were alive. There are often misunderstandings which, never set to rights, make the misery and desolation of a lifetime."

She did not speak at first. Then she pulled out the letter, and said, in a quiet, hopeless tone of voice—

"You can read German writing? Read that, and see if I have any reason for misunderstanding."

The letter was signed "Franz Weber," and dated from some small town in Switzerland—I forget what—about a month previous to the time when I read it. It began with acknowledging the receipt of some money which had evidently been requested by the writer, and for which the thanks were almost fulsome, and then, by the quietest transition in the world, he went on to consult her as to the desirability of his marrying some girl in the place from which he wrote, saying that this Anna Somebody was only eighteen, and very pretty, and her father a well-to-do shopkeeper, and adding, with coarse coxcombry, his belief that he was not indifferent to the maiden herself. He wound up by saying that, if this marriage did take place, he should certainly repay the various sums of money which Thekla had lent him at different times.

I was some time in making out all this. Thekla held the candle for me to read it; held it patiently and steadily, not speaking a word till I had folded up the letter again, and given it back to her. Then our eyes met.

"There is no misunderstanding possible, is there, sir?" asked she, with a faint smile.

"No," I replied; "but you are well rid of such a fellow."

She shook her head a little. "It shows his bad side, sir. We have all our bad sides. You must not judge him harshly; at least, I cannot. But then we were brought up together."

"At Altenahr?"

"Yes; his father kept the other inn, and our parents, instead of being rivals, were great friends. Franz is a little younger than I, and was a delicate child. I had to take him to school, and I used to be so proud of it and of my charge. Then he grew strong, and was the handsomest lad in the village. Our fathers used to sit and smoke together, and talk of our marriage, and Franz must have heard as much as I.

Whenever he was in trouble, he would come to me for what advice I could give him, and he danced twice as often with me as with any other girl at all the dances, and always brought his nose-gay to me. Then his father wished him to travel, and learn the ways at the great hotels on the Rhine before he settled down in Altenahr. You know that is the custom in Germany, sir. They go from town to town as journeymen, learning something fresh everywhere, they say."

"I knew that was done in trades," I replied.

"Oh, yes; and among inn-keepers, too," she said. "Most of the waiters at the great hotels in Frankfort, and Heidelberg, and Mayence, and I dare say at all the other places, are the sons of inn-keepers in small towns, who go out into the world to learn new ways, and perhaps to pick up a little English and French; otherwise, they say, they should never get on. Franz went off from Altenahr on his journeyings four years ago next May-day, and before he went, he brought me back a ring from Bonn, where he bought his new clothes. I don't wear it now; but I have got it upstairs, and it comforts me to see something that shows me it was not all my silly fancy. I suppose he fell among bad people, for he soon began to play for money—and then he lost more than he could always pay; and sometimes I could help him a little, for we wrote to each other from time to time, as we knew each other's addresses; for the little ones grew around my father's hearth, and I thought that I, too, would go forth into the world and earn my own living, so that—well, I will tell the truth—I thought that by going into service, I could lay by enough for buying a handsome stock of household linen, and plenty of pans and kettles against—against what will never come to pass now."

"Do the German women buy the pots and kettles, as you call them, when they are married?" asked I, awkwardly, laying hold of a trivial question to conceal the indignant sympathy with her wrongs which I did not like to express.

"Oh, yes; the bride furnishes all that is wanted in the kitchen, and all the store of house-linen. If my mother had lived, it would have been laid by for me, as she could have afforded to buy it, but my stepmother will have hard enough work to provide for her own four little girls. However,"

she continued, brightening up, "I can help her, for now I shall never marry; and my master here is just and liberal, and pays me sixty florins a year, which is high wages." (Sixty florins are about five pounds sterling.) "And now, good-night, sir. This cup to the left holds the tisane, that to the right the acorn-tea." She shaded the candle, and was leaving the room. I raised myself on my elbow, and called her back.

"Don't go on thinking about this man," said I. "He was not good enough for you. You are much better unmarried."

"Perhaps so," she answered gravely. "But you cannot do him justice; you do not know him."

A few minutes after, I heard her soft and cautious return; she had taken her shoes off, and came in her stocking feet up to my bedside, shading the light with her hand. When she saw that my eyes were open, she laid down two letters on the table, close by my night-lamp.

"Perhaps, some time, sir, you would take the trouble to read these letters; you would then see how noble and clever Franz really is. It is I who ought to be blamed, not he."

No more was said that night.

Some time the next morning I read the letters. They were filled with vague, inflated, sentimental descriptions of his inner life and feelings; entirely egotistical, and intermixed with quotations from second-rate philosophers and poets. There was, it must be said, nothing in them offensive to good principle or good feeling, however much they might be opposed to good taste. I was to go into the next room that afternoon for the first time of leaving my sick chamber. All morning I lay and ruminated. From time to time I thought of Thekla and Franz Weber. She was the strong, good, helpful character, he the weak and vain; how strange it seemed that she should have cared for one so dissimilar; and then I remembered the various happy marriages when to an outsider it seemed as if one was so inferior to the other that their union would have appeared a subject for despair if it had been looked at prospectively. My host came in, in the midst of these meditations, bringing a great flowered dressing-gown, lined with flannel, and the embroidered smoking-cap which he evidently considered as belonging to this Indian-looking robe. They had been his father's, he told

me, and as he helped me to dress he went on with his communications on small family matters. His inn was flourishing; the numbers increased every year of those who came to see the church at Heppenheim—the church which was the pride of the place, but which I had never yet seen. It was built by the great Kaiser Karl. And there was the Castle of Starckenburg, too, which the Abbots of Lorsch had often defended, stalwart churchmen as they were, against the temporal power of the emperors. And Melibocus was not beyond a walk either. In fact, it was the work of one person to superintend the inn alone; but he had his farm and his vineyards beyond, which of themselves gave him enough to do. And his sister was oppressed with the perpetual calls made upon her patience and her nerves in an inn; and would rather go back and live at Worms. And his children wanted so much looking after. By the time he had placed himself in a condition for requiring my full sympathy, I had finished my slow toilette, and I had to interrupt his confidences, and accept the help of his good strong arm to lead me into the great eating-room out of which my chamber opened. I had a dreamy recollection of the vast apartment. But how pleasantly it was changed. There was the bare half of the room, it is true, looking as it had done on that first afternoon, sunless and cheerless, with the long, unoccupied table, and the necessary chairs for the possible visitors; but round the windows that opened on the garden a part of the room was enclosed by the household clothes-horses hung with great pieces of the blue homespun cloth of which the dress of the Black Forest peasant is made. This shut-in space was warmed by the lighted stove, as well as by the lowering rays of the October sun. There was a little round walnut table with some flowers upon it, and a great cushioned arm-chair, placed so as to look out upon the garden and the hills beyond. I felt sure that this was all Thekla's arrangement; I had rather wondered that I had seen so little of her this day. She had come once or twice on necessary errands into my room in the morning, but had appeared to be in great haste, and had avoided meeting my eye. Even when I had returned the letters, which she had intrusted to me with so evident a purpose of placing the writer in my good opinion, she had never inquired as to how far they had answered her design; she had merely taken them with some low word of thanks,

and put them hurriedly into her pocket. I suppose she shrank from remembering how fully she had given me her confidence the night before, now that daylight and actual life pressed close around her. Besides, there surely never was any one in such constant request as Thekla. I did not like this estrangement, though it was the natural consequence of my improved health, which would daily make me less and less require services which seemed so urgently claimed by others. And, moreover, after my host left me—I fear I had cut him a little short in the recapitulation of his domestic difficulties, but he was too thorough and good-hearted a man to bear malice—I wanted to be amused or interested. So I rang my little hand-bell, hoping that Thekla would answer it, when I could have fallen into conversation with her, without specifying any decided want. Instead of Thekla the *Fraülein* came, and I had to invent a wish, for I could not act as a baby, and say that I wanted my nurse. However, the *Fraülein* was better than no one, so I asked her if I could have some grapes, which had been provided for me on every day but this, and which were especially grateful to my feverish palate. She was a good, kind woman, although, perhaps, her temper was not the best in the world; and she expressed the sincerest regret as she told me that there were no more in the house. Like an invalid I fretted at my wish not being granted, and spoke out.

“But Thekla told me the vintage was not till the fourteenth; and you have a vineyard close beyond the garden, on the slope of the hill out there, have you not?”

“Yes; and grapes for the gathering. But perhaps the gentleman does not know our laws. Until the vintage (the day of beginning the vintage is fixed by the Grand Duke, and advertised in the public papers)—until the vintage, all owners of vineyards may only go on two appointed days in every week to gather their grapes; on those two days (Tuesdays and Fridays, this year) they must gather enough for the wants of their families; and if they do not reckon rightly, and gather short measure, why, they have to go without. And these two last days the ‘Half-Moon’ has been besieged with visitors, all of whom have asked for grapes. But to-morrow the gentleman can have as many as he will; it is the day for gathering them.”

“What a strange kind of paternal law,” I grumbled out.

"Why is it so ordained? Is it to secure the owners against pilfering from their unfenced vineyards?"

"I am sure I cannot tell," she replied. "Country people in these villages have strange customs in many ways, as I dare say the English gentleman has perceived. If he would come to Worms he would see a different kind of life."

"But not a view like this," I replied, caught by a sudden change of light—some cloud passing away from the sun, or something. Right outside of the windows was, as I have so often said, the garden. Trained plum-trees with golden leaves, great bushes of purple, Michaelmas daisy, late-flowering roses, apple-trees, partly stripped of their rosy fruit, but still with enough left on their boughs to require the props set to support the luxuriant burden; to the left an arbour covered over with honeysuckle and other sweet-smelling creepers—all bounded by a low grey stone wall which opened out upon the steep vineyard that stretched up the hill beyond, one hill of a series rising higher and higher into the purple distance. "Why is there a rope with a bunch of straw tied in it stretched across the opening of the garden into the vineyard?" I inquired, as my eye suddenly caught upon the object.

"It is the country way of showing that no one must pass along that path. To-morrow the gentleman will see it removed; and then he shall have the grapes. Now I will go and prepare his coffee." With a curtsey, after the fashion of Worms gentility, she withdrew. But an under-servant brought me my coffee; and with her I could not exchange a word: she spoke in such an execrable patois. I went to bed early, weary and depressed. I must have fallen asleep immediately, for I never heard any one come to arrange my bed-side table; yet in the morning I found that every usual want or wish of mine had been attended to.

I was wakened by a tap at my door, and a pretty piping child's voice asking, in broken German, to come in. On giving the usual permission, Thekla entered, carrying a great lovely boy of two years old, or thereabouts, who had only his little night-shirt on, and was all flushed with sleep. He held tight in his hands a great cluster of muscatel and noble grapes. He seemed like a little Bacchus, as she carried him towards me with an expression of pretty loving pride upon her face as she looked at him. But when he came close to me—the grim,

wasted, unshorn—he turned quick away, and hid his face in her neck, still grasping tight his bunch of grapes. She spoke to him rapidly and softly, coaxing him, as I could tell full well, although I could not follow her words; and in a minute or two the little fellow obeyed her, and turned and stretched himself almost to overbalancing out of her arms, and half-dropped the fruit on the bed by me. Then he clutched at her again, burying his face in her kerchief, and fastening his little fists in her luxuriant hair.

“It is my master’s only boy,” said she, disentangling his fingers with quiet patience, only to have them grasp her braids afresh. “He is my little Max, my heart’s delight, only he must not pull so hard. Say his ‘to-meet-again,’ and kiss his hand lovingly, and we will go.” The promise of a speedy departure from my dusky room proved irresistible; he babbled out his *Aufwiedersehen*, and kissing his chubby hand, he was borne away joyful and chattering fast in his infantile half-language. I did not see Thekla again until late afternoon, when she brought me in my coffee. She was not like the same creature as the blooming, cheerful maiden, whom I had seen in the morning; she looked wan and careworn, older by several years.

“What is the matter, Thekla?” said I, with true anxiety as to what might have befallen my good, faithful nurse.

She looked round before answering. “I have seen him,” she said. “He has been here, and the *Fräulein* has been so angry! She says she will tell my master. Oh, it has been such a day!” The poor young woman, who was usually so composed and self-restrained, was on the point of bursting into tears; but by a strong effort she checked herself, and tried to busy herself with rearranging the white china cup, so as to place it more conveniently to my hand.

“Come, Thekla,” said I, “tell me all about it. I have heard loud voices talking, and I fancied something had put the *Fräulein* out; and *Lottchen* looked flurried when she brought me my dinner. Is Franz here? How has he found you out?”

“He is here. Yes, I am sure it is he; but four years make such a difference in a man; his whole look and manner seemed so strange to me; but he knew me at once, and called me all the old names which we used to call each other when we were

children; and he must needs tell me how it had come to pass that he had not married that Swiss Anna. He said he had never loved her; and that now he was going home to settle, and he hoped that I would come too, and"— There she stopped short.

"And marry him, and live at the inn at Altenahr," said I, smiling to reassure her, though I felt rather disappointed about the whole affair.

"No," she replied. "Old Weber, his father, is dead; he died in debt, and Franz will have no money. And he was always one that needed money. Some are, you know; and while I was thinking, and he was standing near me, the Fräulein came in; and—and—I don't wonder—for poor Franz is not a pleasant-looking man nowadays—she was very angry, and called me a bold, bad girl, and said she could have no such goings on at the 'Halbmond,' but would tell my master when he came home from the forest."

"But you could have told her that you were old friends." I hesitated before saying the word lovers, but, after a pause, out it came.

"Franz might have said so," she replied, a little stiffly. "I could not; but he went off as soon as she bade him. He went to the 'Adler' over the way, only saying he would come for my answer to-morrow morning. I think it was he that should have told her what we were—neighbours' children and early friends—not have left it all to me. Oh," said she, clasping her hands tight together, "she will make such a story of it to my master."

"Never mind," said I, "tell the master I want to see him, as soon as he comes in from the forest, and trust me to set him right before the Fräulein has the chance to set him wrong."

She looked up at me gratefully, and went away without any more words. Presently, the fine burly figure of my host stood at the opening to my enclosed sitting-room. He was there, three-cornered hat in hand, looking tired and heated as a man does after a hard day's work, but as kindly and genial as ever, which is not what every man is who is called to business after such a day, before he has had the necessary food and rest.

I had been reflecting a good deal on Thekla's story; I could not quite interpret her manner to-day to my full satisfaction; but yet the love which had grown with her growth, must

assuredly have been called forth by her lover's sudden re-appearance; and I was inclined to give him some credit for having broken off an engagement to Swiss Anna, which had promised so many worldly advantages; and, again, I had considered that if he was a little weak and sentimental, it was Thekla who would marry him by her own free will, and perhaps she had sense and quiet resolution enough for both. So I gave the heads of the little history I have told you to my good friend and host, adding that I should like to have a man's opinion of this man; but that if he were not an absolute good-for-nothing, and if Thekla still loved him, as I believed, I would try and advance them the requisite money towards establishing themselves in the hereditary inn at Altenahr.

Such was the romantic ending to Thekla's sorrows I had been planning and brooding over for the last hour. As I narrated my tale, and hinted at the possible happy conclusion that might be in store, my host's face changed. The ruddy colour faded, and his look became almost stern—certainly very grave in expression. It was so unsympathetic, that I instinctively cut my words short. When I had done, he paused a little, and then said, "You would wish me to learn all I can respecting this stranger now at the 'Adler,' and give you the impression I receive of the fellow."

"Exactly so," said I. "I want to learn all I can about him for Thekla's sake."

"For Thekla's sake I will do it," he gravely repeated.

"And come to me to-night, even if I am gone to bed?"

"Not so," he replied. "You must give me all the time you can in a matter like this."

"But he will come for Thekla's answer in the morning."

"Before he comes you shall know all I can learn."

I was resting during the fatigues of dressing the next day, when my host tapped at my door. He looked graver and sterner than I had ever seen him do before. He sat down almost before I had begged him to do so.

"He is not worthy of her," he said. "He drinks brandy right hard; he boasts of his success at play, and"—here he set his teeth hard—"he boasts of the women who have loved him. In a village like this, sir, there are always those who spend their evenings in the gardens of the inns; and this man, after he had drank his fill, made no secrets. It needed no

spying to find out what he was, else I should not have been the one to do it."

"Thekla must be told of this," said I. "She is not the woman to love any one whom she cannot respect."

Herr Müller laughed a low, bitter laugh, quite unlike himself. Then he replied—

"As for that matter, sir, you are young; you have had no great experience of women. From what my sister tells me there can be little doubt of Thekla's feeling towards him. She found them standing together by the window—his arm round Thekla's waist, and whispering in her ear; and, to do the maiden justice, she is not the one to suffer such familiarities from every one. No," continued he, still in the same contemptuous tone, "you'll find she will make excuses for his faults and vices; or else, which is perhaps more likely, she will not believe your story, though I who tell it you can vouch for the truth of every word I say." He turned short away and left the room. Presently I saw his stalwart figure in the hill-side vineyard, before my windows, scaling the steep ascent with long, regular steps, going to the forest beyond. I was otherwise occupied than in watching his progress during the next hour. At the end of that time he re-entered my room, looking heated and slightly tired, as if he had been walking fast or labouring hard; but with the cloud off his brows, and the kindly light shining once again out of his honest eyes.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he began, "for troubling you afresh. I believe I was possessed by the devil this morning. I have been thinking it over. One has, perhaps, no right to rule for another person's happiness. To have such a"—here the honest fellow choked a little—"such a woman as Thekla to love him ought to raise any man. Besides, I am no judge for him or for her. I have found out this morning that I love her myself; and so the end of it is, that if you, sir, who are so kind as to interest yourself in the matter, and if you think it is really her heart's desire to marry this man—which ought to be his salvation both for earth and heaven—I shall be very glad to go halves with you in any plan for setting them up in the inn at Altenahr; only allow me to see that whatever money we advance is well and legally tied up, so that it is secured to her. And be so kind as to take no notice of what I have said about my having found out that I have loved her.

I named it as a kind of apology for my hard words this morning, and as a reason why I was not a fit judge of what was best." He had hurried on so that I could not have stopped his eager speaking even had I wished to do so; but I was too much interested in the revelation of what was passing in his brave tender heart to desire to stop him. Now, however, his rapid words tripped each other up, and his speech ended in an unconscious sigh.

"But," I said, "since you were here Thekla has come to me, and we have had a long talk. She speaks now as openly to me as she would if I were her brother; with sensible frankness, where frankness is wise—with modest reticence, where confidence would be unbecoming. She came to ask me if I thought it her duty to marry this fellow, whose very appearance, changed for the worse, as she says it is, since she last saw him four years ago, seemed to have repelled her."

"She could let him put his arm round her waist yesterday," said Herr Müller, with a return of his morning's surliness.

"And she would marry him now if she could believe it to be her duty. For some reason of his own this Franz Weber has tried to work upon this feeling of hers. He said it would be the saving of him."

"As if a man had not strength enough in him—a man who is good for aught—to save himself, but needed a woman to pull him through life."

"Nay," I replied, hardly able to keep from smiling, "you yourself said, not five minutes ago, that her marrying him might be his salvation both for earth and heaven."

"That was when I thought she loved the fellow," he answered quick. "Now—— but what did you say to her, sir?"

"I told her, what I believe to be as true as gospel, that as she owned she did not love him any longer, now his real self had come to displace his remembrance, that she would be sinning in marrying him—doing evil that possible good might come. I was clear myself on this point, though I should have been perplexed how to advise if her love had still continued."

"And what answer did she make?"

"She went over the history of their lives. She was pleading against her wishes to satisfy her conscience. She said that all along through their childhood she had been his strength; that

while under her personal influence he had been negatively good ; away from her, he had fallen into mischief"——

"Not to say vice," put in Herr Müller.

"And now he came to her penitent, in sorrow, desirous of amendment, asking her for the love she seems to have considered as tacitly plighted to him in years gone by"——

"And which he has slighted and insulted. I hope you told her of his words and conduct last night in the 'Adler' gardens?"

"No ; I kept myself to the general principle, which, I am sure, is a true one. I repeated it in different forms ; for the idea of the duty of self-sacrifice had taken strong possession of her fancy. Perhaps, if I had failed in setting her notion of her duty in the right aspect, I might have had recourse to the statement of facts, which would have pained her severely, but would have proved to her how little his words of penitence and promises of amendment were to be trusted to."

"And it ended?"

"Ended by her being quite convinced that she would be doing wrong instead of right if she married a man whom she had entirely ceased to love, and that no real good could come from a course of action based on wrongdoing."

"That is right and true," he replied, his face broadening into happiness again.

"But she says she must leave your service, and go elsewhere."

"Leave my service she shall ; go elsewhere she shall not."

"I cannot tell what you may have the power of inducing her to do ; but she seems to me very resolute."

"Why?" said he, firing round at me, as if I had made her resolute.

"She says your sister spoke to her before the maids of the household, and before some of the townspeople, in a way that she could not stand ; and that you yourself, by your manner to her last night, showed how she had lost your respect. She added, with her face of pure maidenly truth, that he had come into such close contact with her only the instant before your sister had entered the room."

"With your leave, sir," said Herr Müller, turning towards the door, "I will go and set all that right at once."

It was easier said than done. When I next saw Thekla,

her eyes were swollen up with crying, but she was silent, almost defiant towards me. A look of resolute determination had settled down upon her face. I learnt afterwards that parts of my conversation with Herr Müller had been injudiciously quoted by him in the talk he had had with her. I thought I would leave her to herself, and wait till she unburdened herself of the feelings of unjust resentment towards me. But it was days before she spoke to me with anything like her former frankness. I had heard all about it from my host long before.

He had gone to her straight on leaving me; and like a foolish, impetuous lover, had spoken out his mind and his wishes to her in the presence of his sister, who, it must be remembered, had heard no explanation of the conduct which had given her propriety so great a shock the day before. Herr Müller thought to reinstate Thekla in his sister's good opinion by giving her in the Fräulein's very presence the highest possible mark of his own love and esteem. And there in the kitchen, where the Fräulein was deeply engaged in the hot work of making some delicate preserve on the stove, and ordering Thekla about with short, sharp displeasure in her tones, the master had come in, and possessing himself of the maiden's hand, had, to her infinite surprise—to his sister's infinite indignation—made her the offer of his heart, his wealth, his life; had begged of her to marry him. I could gather from his account that she had been in a state of trembling discomfiture at first; she had not spoken, but had twisted her hand out of his, and had covered her face with her apron. And then the Fräulein had burst forth—"accursed words," he called her speech. Thekla uncovered her face to listen—to listen to the end—to listen to the passionate recrimination between the brother and the sister. And then she went up close to the angry Fräulein, and had said, quite quietly, but with a manner of final determination which had evidently sunk deep into her suitor's heart, and depressed him into hopelessness, that the Fräulein had no need to disturb herself; that on this very day she had been thinking of marrying another man, and that her heart was not like a room to let, into which as one tenant went out another might enter. Nevertheless, she felt the master's goodness. He had always treated her well from the time when she had entered the

house as his servant. And she should be sorry to leave him; sorry to leave the children, very sorry to leave little Max; yes, she should even be sorry to leave the Fräulein, who was a good woman, only a little too apt to be hard on other women. But she had already been that very day and deposited her warning at the police office; the busy time would be soon over, and she should be glad to leave their service on All Saints' Day. Then (he thought) she had felt inclined to cry, for she suddenly braced herself up, and said, yes, she should be very glad; for somehow, though they had been kind to her, she had been very unhappy at Heppenheim; and she would go back to her home for a time, and see her old father and kind step-mother, and her nursling half-sister Ida, and be among her own people again.

I could see it was this last part that most of all rankled in Herr Müller's mind. In all probability Franz Weber was making his way back to Altenabr too; and the bad suspicion would keep welling up that some lingering feeling for her old lover and disgraced playmate was making her so resolute to leave and return to Altenahr.

For some days after this I was the confidant of the whole household, excepting Thekla. She, poor creature, looked miserable enough; but the hardy, defiant expression was always on her face. Lottchen spoke out freely enough; the place would not be worth having if Thekla left it; it was she who had the head for everything, the patience for everything; who stood between all the under-servants and the Fräulein's tempers. As for the children, poor motherless children! Lottchen was sure that the master did not know what he was doing when he allowed his sister to turn Thekla away—and all for what? for having a lover, as every girl had who could get one. Why, the little boy Max slept in the room which Lottchen shared with Thekla; and she heard him in the night as quickly as if she was his mother; when she had been sitting up with me, when I was so ill, Lottchen had had to attend to him; and it was weary work after a hard day to have to get up and soothe a teething child; she knew she had been cross enough sometimes; but Thekla was always good and gentle with him, however tired she was. And as Lottchen left the room I could hear her repeating that she thought she should leave

when Thekla went, for that her place would not be worth having.

Even the Fräulein had her word of regret—regret mingled with self-justification. She thought she had been quite right in speaking to Thekla for allowing such familiarities; how was she to know that the man was an old friend and play-mate? He looked like a right profligate good-for-nothing. And to have a servant take up her scolding as an unpardonable offence, and persist in quitting her place, just when she had learnt all her work, and was so useful in the household—so useful that the Fräulein could never put up with any fresh, stupid house-maiden; but, sooner than take the trouble of teaching the new servant where everything was, and how to give out the stores if she was busy, she would go back to Worms. For, after all, housekeeping for a brother was thankless work; there was no satisfying men; and Heppenheim was but a poor ignorant village compared to Worms.

She must have spoken to her brother about her intention of leaving him and returning to her former home; indeed, a feeling of coolness had evidently grown up between the brother and sister during these latter days. When one evening Herr Müller brought in his pipe, and, as his custom had sometimes been, sat down by my stove to smoke, he looked gloomy and annoyed. I let him puff away, and take his own time. At length he began—

“I have rid the village of him at last. I could not bear to have him here disgracing Thekla with speaking to her whenever she went to the vineyard or the fountain. I don't believe she likes him a bit.”

“No more do I,” I said. He turned on me—

“Then why did she speak to him at all? Why cannot she like an honest man who likes her? Why is she so bent on going home to Altenahr?”

“She speaks to him because she has known him from a child, and has a faithful pity for one whom she has known so innocent, and who is now so lost in all good men's regard. As for not liking an honest man (though I may have my own opinion about that), liking goes by fancy, as we say in English; and Altenahr is her home; her father's house is at Altenahr, as you know.”

“I wonder if he will go there,” quoth Herr Müller, after

two or three more puffs. "He was fast at the 'Adler;' he could not pay his score, so he kept on staying here, saying that he should receive a letter from a friend with money in a day or two; lying in wait, too, for Thekla, who is well known and respected all through Heppenheim: so his being an old friend of hers made him have a kind of standing. I went in this morning and paid his score, on condition that he left the place this day; and he left the village as merrily as a cricket, caring no more for Thekla than for the Kaiser who built our church; for he never looked back at the 'Halbmond,' but went whistling down the road."

"That is a good riddance," said I.

"Yes. But my sister says she must return to Worms. And Lottchen has given notice; she says the place will not be worth having when Thekla leaves. I wish I could give notice too."

"Try Thekla again."

"Not I," said he, reddening. "It would seem now as if I only wanted her for a housekeeper. Besides, she avoids me at every turn, and will not even look at me. I am sure she bears me some ill-will about that ne'er-do-well."

There was silence between us for some time, which he at length broke.

"The pastor has a good and comely daughter. Her mother is a famous housewife. They often have asked me to come to the parsonage and smoke a pipe. When the vintage is over, and I am less busy; I think I will go there and look about me."

"When is the vintage?" asked I. "I hope it will take place soon, for I am growing so well and strong I fear I must leave you shortly; but I should like to see the vintage first."

"Oh, never fear! you must not travel yet awhile; and Government has fixed the grape-gathering to begin on the fourteenth."

"What a paternal Government! How does it know when the grapes will be ripe? Why cannot every man fix his own time for gathering his own grapes?"

"That has never been our way in Germany. There are people employed by the Government to examine the vines, and report when the grapes are ripe. It is necessary to make laws about it; for, as you must have seen, there is

nothing but the fear of the law to protect our vineyards and fruit-trees; there are no enclosures along the Berg-Strasse, as you tell me you have in England; but, as people are only allowed to go into the vineyards on stated days, no one, under pretence of gathering his own produce, can stray into his neighbour's grounds and help himself, without some of the duke's foresters seeing him."

"Well," said I, "to each country its own laws."

I think it was on that very evening that Thekla came in for something. She stopped arranging the table-cloth and the flowers, as if she had something to say, yet did not know how to begin. At length I found that her sore, hot heart wanted some sympathy; her hand was against every one's, and she fancied every one had turned against her. She looked up at me, and said, a little abruptly—

"Does the gentleman know that I go on the fifteenth?"

"So soon?" said I, with surprise. "I thought you were to remain here till All Saints' Day."

"So I should have done—so I must have done—if the Fräulein had not kindly given me leave to accept of a place—a very good place, too—of housekeeper to a widow lady at Frankfort. It is just the sort of situation I have always wished for. I expect I shall be so happy and comfortable there."

"Methinks the lady doth protest too much," came into my mind. I saw she expected me to doubt the probability of her happiness, and was in a defiant mood.

"Of course," said I, "you would hardly have wished to leave Heppenheim if you had been happy here; and every new place always promises fair, whatever its performance may be. But wherever you go, remember you have always a friend in me."

"Yes," she replied, "I think you are to be trusted. Though, from my experience, I should say that of very few men."

"You have been unfortunate," I answered: "many men would say the same of women."

She thought a moment, and then said, in a changed tone of voice, "The Fräulein here has been much more friendly and helpful of these late days than her brother; yet I have served him faithfully, and have cared for his little Max as

though he were my own brother. But this morning he spoke to me for the first time for many days; he met me in the passage, and, suddenly stopping, he said he was glad I had met with so comfortable a place, and that I was at full liberty to go whenever I liked: and then he went quickly on, never waiting for my answer."

"And what was wrong in that? It seems to me he was trying to make you feel entirely at your ease, to do as you thought best, without regard to his own interests."

"Perhaps so. It is silly, I know," she continued, turning full on me her grave, innocent eyes; "but one's vanity suffers a little when every one is so willing to part with one."

"Thekla! I owe you a great debt—let me speak to you openly. I know that your master wanted to marry you, and that you refused him. Do not deceive yourself. You are sorry for that refusal now?"

She kept her serious look fixed upon me; but her face and throat reddened all over.

"No," said she, at length; "I am not sorry. What can you think I am made of; having loved one man ever since I was a little child until a fortnight ago, and now just as ready to love another? I know you do not rightly consider what you say, or I should take it as an insult."

"You loved an ideal man; he disappointed you, and you clung to your remembrance of him. He came, and the reality dispelled all illusions."

"I do not understand philosophy," said she. "I only know that I think that Herr Müller had lost all respect for me from what his sister had told him; and I know that I am going away; and I trust I shall be happier in Frankfort than I have been here of late days." So saying, she left the room.

I was wakened up on the morning of the fourteenth by the merry ringing of church bells, and the perpetual firing and popping off of guns and pistols. But all this was over by the time I was up and dressed, and seated at breakfast in my partitioned room. It was a perfect October day; the dew not yet off the blades of grass, glistening on the delicate gossamer webs, which stretched from flower to flower in the garden, lying in the morning shadow of the house. But beyond the garden, on the sunny hill-side, men, women,

and children were clambering up the vineyards like ants—busy, irregular in movement, clustering together, spreading wide apart—I could hear the shrill merry voices as I sat—and all along the valley, as far as I could see, it was much the same; for every one filled his house for the day of the vintage, that great annual festival. Lottchen, who had brought in my breakfast, was all in her Sunday best, having risen early to get her work done and go abroad to gather grapes. Bright colours seemed to abound; I could see dots of scarlet, and crimson, and orange through the fading leaves; it was not a day to languish in the house; and I was on the point of going out by myself, when Herr Müller came in to offer me his sturdy arm, and help me in walking to the vineyard. We crept through the garden, scented with late flowers and sunny fruit—we passed through the gate I had so often gazed at from the easy-chair, and were in the busy vineyard; great baskets lay on the grass already piled nearly full of purple and yellow grapes. The wine made from these was far from pleasant to my taste; for the best Rhine wine is made from a smaller grape, growing in closer, harder clusters; but the larger and less profitable grape is by far the most picturesque in its mode of growth, and far the best to eat into the bargain. Wherever we trod, it was on fragrant, crushed vine-leaves; every one we saw had his hands and face stained with the purple juice. Presently I sat down on a sunny bit of grass, and my host left me to go further afield, to look after the more distant vineyards. I watched his progress. After he left me, he took off coat and waiscoat, displaying his snowy shirt and gaily-worked braces; and presently he was as busy as any one. I looked down on the village; the grey and orange and crimson roofs lay glowing in the noonday sun. I could see down into the streets; but they were all empty—even the old people came toiling up the hill-side to share in the general festivity. Lottchen had brought up cold dinners for a regiment of men; every one came and helped himself. Thekla was there, leading the little Karoline, and helping the toddling steps of Max; but she kept aloof from me; for I knew, or suspected, or had probed too much. She alone looked sad and grave, and spoke so little, even to her friends, that it was evident to see that she was trying to wean herself finally from the place. But I could see that she had lost her short, defiant manner. What she did

say was kindly and gently spoken. The Fräulein came out late in the morning, dressed, I suppose, in the latest Worms fashion—quite different to anything I had ever seen before. She came up to me, and talked very graciously to me for some time.

“Here comes the proprietor (squire) and his lady, and their dear children. See, the vintagers have tied bunches of the finest grapes on to a stick, heavier than the children, or even the lady can carry. Look! look! how he bows!—one can tell he has been an *attaché* at Vienna. That is the Court way of bowing there—holding the hat right down before them, and bending the back at right angles. How graceful! And here is the doctor! I thought he would spare time to come up here. Well, doctor, you will go all the more cheerfully to your next patient for having been up into the vineyards. Nonsense, about grapes making other patients for you. Ah, here is the pastor and his wife, and the Fräulein Anna. Now, where is my brother, I wonder? Up in the far vineyard, I make no doubt. Mr. Pastor, the view up above is far finer than what it is here, and the best grapes grow there; shall I accompany you and madame, and the dear Fräulein? The gentleman will excuse me.”

I was left alone. Presently I thought I would walk a little farther, or at any rate change my position. I rounded a corner in the pathway, and there I found Thekla, watching by little sleeping Max. He lay on her shawl; and over his head she had made an arching canopy of broken vine-branches, so that the great leaves threw their cool, flickering shadows on his face. He was smeared all over with grape-juice, his sturdy fingers grasped a half-eaten bunch even in his sleep. Thekla was keeping Lina quiet by teaching her how to weave a garland for her head out of field-flowers and autumn-tinted leaves. The maiden sat on the ground, with her back to the valley beyond, the child kneeling by her, watching the busy fingers with eager intentness. Both looked up as I drew near, and we exchanged a few words.

“Where is the master?” I asked. “I promised to await his return; he wished to give me his arm down the wooden steps; but I do not see him.”

“He is in the higher vineyard,” said Thekla quietly, but not looking round in that direction. “He will be some time there, I should think. He went with the pastor and his wife: he will

have to speak to his labourers and his friends. My arm is strong; and I can leave Max in Lina's care for five minutes. If you are tired, and want to go back, let me help you down the steps; they are steep and slippery."

I had turned to look up the valley. Three or four hundred yards off, in the higher vineyard, walked the dignified pastor, and his homely decorous wife. Behind came the Fräulein Anna, in her short-sleeved Sunday gown, daintily holding a parasol over her luxuriant brown hair. Close behind her came Herr Müller, stopping now to speak to his men—again, to cull out a bunch of grapes to tie on to the Fräulein's stick; and by my feet sate the proud serving-maid in her country dress, waiting for my answer, with serious, upturned eyes, and sad, composed face.

"No, I am much obliged to you, Thekla; and if I did not feel so strong, I would have thankfully taken your arm. But I only wanted to leave a message for the master, just to say that I have gone home."

"Lina will give it to the father when he comes down," said Thekla.

I went slowly down into the garden. The great labour of the day was over, and the younger part of the population had returned to the village, and were preparing the fireworks and pistol-shootings for the evening. Already one or two of those well-known German carts (in the shape of a V) were standing near the vineyard gates, the patient oxen meekly waiting while basketful after basketful of grapes were being emptied into the leaf-lined receptacle.

As I sat down in my easy-chair close to the open window through which I had entered, I could see the men and women on the hill-side drawing to a centre, and all stand round the pastor, bareheaded, for a minute or so. I guessed that some words of holy thanksgiving were being said, and I wished that I had stayed to hear them, and mark my especial gratitude for having been spared to see that day. Then I heard the distant voices, the deep tones of the men, the shriller pipes of women and children, join in the German harvest-hymn, which is generally sung on such occasions; * then silence, while I concluded

* Wir pflügen und wir streuen
Den Saamen auf das Land;

that a blessing was spoken by the pastor, with outstretched arms; and then they once more dispersed, some to the village, some to finish their labours for the day among the vines. I saw Thekla coming through the garden with Max in her arms, and Lina clinging to her woollen skirts. Thekla made for my open window; it was rather a shorter passage into the house than round by the door. "I may come through, may I not?" she asked softly. "I fear Max is not well; I cannot understand his look, and he wakened up so strange!" She paused to let me see the child's face; it was flushed almost to a crimson look of heat, and his breathing was laboured and uneasy, his eyes half-open and filmy.

"Something is wrong, I am sure," said I. "I don't know anything about children, but he is not in the least like himself."

She bent down and kissed the cheek so tenderly that she would not have bruised the petal of a rose. "Heart's darling," she murmured. He quivered all over at her touch, working his fingers in an unnatural kind of way, and ending with a convulsive twitching all over his body. Lina began to cry at the grave, anxious look on our faces.

"You had better call the Fräulein to look at him," said I. "I feel sure he ought to have a doctor; I should say he was going to have a fit."

"The Fräulein and the master are gone to the pastor's for coffee, and Lottchen is in the higher vineyard, taking the men their bread and beer. Could you find the kitchen-girl, or old Karl? he will be in the stables, I think. I must lose no time." Almost without waiting for my reply, she had passed through the room, and in the empty house I could hear her firm, careful footsteps going up the stair; Lina's pattering beside her; and the one voice wailing, the other speaking low comfort.

I was tired enough, but this good family had treated me too

Das Wachsen und Gedeihen
 Steht, in des Höchsten Hand.
 Er sendet Thau und Regen,
 Und Sonn und Mondenschein;
 Von Ihm kommt aller Segen,
 Von unserm Gott allein:
 Alle gute Gabe kommt her
 Von Gott dem Herrn,
 Drum dankt und hofft auf Ihm.

much like one of their own for me not to do what I could in such a case as this. I made my way out into the street, for the first time since I had come to the house on that memorable evening six weeks ago. I bribed the first person I met to guide me to the doctor's, and sent him straight down to the "Halbmond," not staying to listen to the thorough scolding he fell to giving me; then on to the parsonage, to tell the master and the Fräulein of the state of things at home.

I was sorry to be the bearer of bad news into such a festive chamber as the pastor's. There they sat, resting after heat and fatigue, each in their best gala dress, the table spread with "Dicker-milch," potato-salad, cakes of various shapes and kinds—all the dainty cates dear to the German palate. The pastor was talking to Herr Müller, who stood near the pretty young Fräulein Anna, in her fresh white chemisette, with her round white arms, and her youthful coquetish airs, as she prepared to pour out the coffee; our Fräulein was talking busily to the Frau Mama; the younger boys and girls of the family filling up the room. A ghost would have startled the assembled party less than I did, and would probably have been more welcome, considering the news I brought. As he listened, the master caught up his hat and went forth, without apology or farewell. Our Fräulein made up for both, and questioned me fully; but now she, I could see, was in haste to go, although restrained by her manners, and the kind-hearted Frau Pastorin soon set her at liberty to follow her inclination. As for me I was dead beat, and only too glad to avail myself of the hospitable couple's pressing request that I would stop and share their meal. Other magnates of the village came in presently, and relieved me of the strain of keeping up a German conversation about nothing at all with entire strangers. The pretty Fräulein's face had clouded over a little at Herr Müller's sudden departure; but she was soon as bright as could be, giving private chase and sudden little scoldings to her brothers, as they made raids upon the dainties under her charge. After I was duly rested and refreshed, I took my leave; for I, too, had my quieter anxieties about the sorrow in the Müller family.

The only person I could see at the "Halbmond" was Lottchen; every one else was busy about the poor little Max, who was passing from one fit into another. I told Lottchen

to ask the doctor to come in and see me before he took his leave for the night, and tired as I was, I kept up till after his visit, though it was very late before he came ; I could see from his face how anxious he was. He would give me no opinion as to the child's chances of recovery, from which I guessed that he had not much hope. But when I expressed my fear he cut me very short.

"The truth is, you know nothing about it ; no more do I, for that matter. It is enough to try any man, much less a father, to hear his perpetual moans—not that he is conscious of pain, poor little worm ; but if she stops for a moment in her perpetual carrying him backwards and forwards, he plains so piteously it is enough to—enough to make a man bless the Lord who never led him into the pit of matrimony. To see the father up there, following her as she walks up and down the room, the child's head over her shoulder, and Müller trying to make the heavy eyes recognise the old familiar ways of play, and the chirruping sounds which he can scarce make for crying—I shall be here to-morrow early, though before that either life or death will have come without the old doctor's help."

All night long I dreamt my feverish dream—of the vineyard—the carts, which held little coffins instead of baskets of grapes—of the pastor's daughter, who would pull the dying child out of Thekla's arms ; it was a bad, weary night ! I slept long into the morning ; the broad daylight filled my room, and yet no one had been near to waken me ! Did that mean life or death ? I got up and dressed as fast as I could ; for I was aching all over with the fatigue of the day before. Out into the sitting-room ; the table was laid for breakfast, but no one was there. I passed into the house beyond, up the stairs, blindly seeking for the room where I might know whether it was life or death. At the door of a room I found Lottchen crying ; at the sight of me in that unwonted place she started, and began some kind of apology, broken both by tears and smiles, as she told me that the doctor said the danger was over—past, and that Max was sleeping a gentle peaceful slumber in Thekla's arms—arms that had held him all through the livelong night.

"Look at him, sir ; only go in softly ; it is a pleasure to see the child to-day ; tread softly, sir."

She opened the chamber-door. I could see Thekla sitting, propped up by cushions and stools, holding her heavy burden,

and bending over him with a look of tenderest love. Not far off stood the Fräulein, all disordered and tearful, stirring or seasoning some hot soup, while the master stood by her impatient. As soon as it was cooled or seasoned enough he took the basin and went to Thekla, and said something very low ; she lifted up her head, and I could see her face ; pale, weary with watching, but with a soft, peaceful look upon it, which it had not worn for weeks. Fritz Müller began to feed her, for her hands were occupied in holding his child ; I could not help remembering Mrs. Inchbald's pretty description of Dorriforth's anxiety in feeding Miss Milner ; she compares it, if I remember rightly, to that of a tender-hearted boy, caring for his darling bird, the loss of which would embitter all the joys of his holidays. We closed the door without noise, so as not to waken the sleeping child. Lottchen brought me my coffee and bread ; she was ready either to laugh or to weep on the slightest occasion. I could not tell if it was in innocence or mischief she asked me the following question—

“Do you think Thekla will leave to-day, sir?”

In the afternoon I heard Thekla's step behind my extemporary screen. I knew it quite well. She stopped for a moment before emerging into my view.

She was trying to look as composed as usual, but, perhaps because her steady nerves had been shaken by her night's watching, she could not help faint touches of dimples at the corners of her mouth, and her eyes were veiled from any inquisitive look by their drooping lids.

“I thought you would like to know that the doctor says Max is quite out of danger now. He will only require care.”

“Thank you, Thekla ; Doctor — has been in already this afternoon to tell me so, and I am truly glad.”

She went to the window, and looked out for a moment. Many people were in the vineyards again to-day ; although we, in our household anxiety, had paid them but little heed. Suddenly she turned round into the room, and I saw that her face was crimson with blushes. In another instant Herr Müller entered by the window.

“Has she told you, sir?” said he, possessing himself of her hand, and looking all aglow with happiness. “Hast thou told our good friend?” addressing her.

"No. I was going to tell him, but I did not know how to begin."

"Then I will prompt thee. Say after me—'I have been a wilful, foolish woman'"—

She wrenched her hand out of his, half-laughing—"I am a foolish woman, for I have promised to marry him. But he is a still more foolish man, for he wishes to marry me. That is what I say."

"And I have sent Babette to Frankfort with the pastor. He is going there, and will explain all to Frau v. Schmidt; and Babette will serve her for a time. When Max is well enough to have the change of air the doctor prescribes for him, thou shalt take him to Altenahr, and thither will I also go; and become known to thy people and thy father. And before Christmas the gentleman here shall dance at our wedding."

"I must go home to England, dear friends, before many days are over. Perhaps we may travel together as far as Remagen. Another year I will come back to Heppenheim and see you."

As I planned it, so it was. We left Heppenheim all together on a lovely All-Saints' day. The day before—the day of All-Souls—I had watched Fritz and Thekla lead little Lina up to the Acre of God, the Field of Rest, to hang the wreath of immortelles on her mother's grave. Peace be with the dead and the living.



LIZZIE LEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Death is present in a household on a Christmas Day, the very contrast between the time as it now is, and the day as it has often been, gives a poignancy to sorrow—a more utter blankness to the desolation. James Leigh died just as the far-away bells of Rochdale Church were ringing for morning service on Christmas Day, 1836. A few minutes before his death, he opened his already glazing eyes, and made a sign to his wife, by the faint motion of his lips, that he had yet something to say. She stooped close down, and caught the broken whisper, “I forgive her, Annie! May God forgive me!”

“Oh, my love, my dear! only get well, and I will never cease showing my thanks for those words. May God in heaven bless thee for saying them. Thou’rt not so restless, my lad! may be—Oh, God!”

For even while she spoke he died.

They had been two-and-twenty years man and wife; for nineteen of those years their life had been as calm and happy as the most perfect uprightness on the one side, and the most complete confidence and loving submission on the other, could make it. Milton’s famous line might have been framed and hung up as the rule of their married life, for he was truly the interpreter, who stood between God and her; she would have considered herself wicked if she had ever dared even to think him austere, though as certainly as he was an upright man, so surely was he hard, stern, and inflexible. But for three years the moan and the murmur had never been out of her heart; she had rebelled against her husband as against a tyrant, with a hidden, sullen rebellion, which tore up the old

landmarks of wifely duty and affection, and poisoned the fountains whence gentlest love and reverence had once been for ever springing.

But those last blessed words replaced him on his throne in her heart, and called out penitent anguish for all the bitter estrangement of later years. It was this which made her refuse all the entreaties of her sons, that she would see the kind-hearted neighbours, who called on their way from church, to sympathise and condole. No! she would stay with the dead husband that had spoken tenderly at last, if for three years he had kept silence; who knew but what, if she had only been more gentle and less angrily reserved he might have relented earlier—and in time?

She sat rocking herself to and fro by the side of the bed, while the footsteps below went in and out; she had been in sorrow too long to have any violent burst of deep grief now; the furrows were well worn in her cheeks, and the tears flowed quietly, if incessantly, all the day long. But when the winter's night drew on, and the neighbours had gone away to their homes, she stole to the window, and gazed out, long and wistfully, over the dark grey moors. She did not hear her son's voice, as he spoke to her from the door, nor his footstep as he drew nearer. She started when he touched her.

"Mother! come down to us. There's no one but Will and me. Dearest mother, we do so want you." The poor lad's voice trembled, and he began to cry. It appeared to require an effort on Mrs. Leigh's part to tear herself away from the window, but with a sigh she complied with his request.

The two boys (for though Will was nearly twenty-one, she still thought of him as a lad) had done everything in their power to make the house-place comfortable for her. She herself, in the old days before her sorrow, had never made a brighter fire or a cleaner hearth, ready for her husband's return home, than now awaited her. The tea-things were all put out, and the kettle was boiling; and the boys had calmed their grief down into a kind of sober cheerfulness. They paid her every attention they could think of, but received little notice on her part; she did not resist, she rather submitted to all their arrangements; but they did not seem to touch her heart.

When tea was ended—it was merely the form of tea that had been gone through—Will moved the things away to the dresser. His mother leant back languidly in her chair.

“Mother, shall Tom read you a chapter? He’s a better scholar than I.”

“Ay, lad!” said she, almost eagerly. “That’s it. Read me the Prodigal Son. Ay, ay, lad. Thank thee.”

Tom found the chapter, and read it in the high-pitched voice which is customary in village schools. His mother bent forward, her lips parted, her eyes dilated; her whole body instinct with eager attention. Will sat with his head depressed and hung down. He knew why that chapter had been chosen; and to him it recalled the family’s disgrace. When the reading was ended, he still hung down his head in gloomy silence. But her face was brighter than it had been before for the day. Her eyes looked dreamy, as if she saw a vision; and by-and-by she pulled the Bible towards her, and, putting her finger underneath each word, began to read them aloud in a low voice to herself; she read again the words of bitter sorrow and deep humiliation; but most of all, she paused and brightened over the father’s tender reception of the repentant prodigal.

So passed the Christmas evening in the Upclose Farm.

The snow had fallen heavily over the dark waving moorland before the day of the funeral. The black storm-laden dome of heaven lay very still and close upon the white earth, as they carried the body forth out of the house which had known his presence so long as its ruling power. Two and two the mourners followed, making a black procession, in their winding march over the unbeaten snow, to Milne Row Church; now lost in some hollow of the bleak moors, now slowly climbing the heaving ascents. There was no long tarrying after the funeral, for many of the neighbours who accompanied the body to the grave had far to go, and the great white flakes which came slowly down were the boding forerunners of a heavy storm. One old friend alone accompanied the widow and her sons to their home.

The Upclose Farm had belonged for generations to the Leighs; and yet its possession hardly raised them above the rank of labourers. There was the house and out-buildings, all of an old-fashioned kind, and about seven acres of barren

unproductive land, which they had never possessed capital enough to improve; indeed, they could hardly rely upon it for subsistence; and it had been customary to bring up the sons to some trade, such as a wheelwright's or blacksmith's.

James Leigh had left a will in the possession of the old man who accompanied them home. He read it aloud. James had bequeathed the farm to his faithful wife, Anne Leigh, for her lifetime, and afterwards to his son William. The hundred and odd pounds in the savings bank was to accumulate for Thomas.

After the reading was ended, Anne Leigh sat silent for a time, and then she asked to speak to Samuel Orme alone. The sons went into the back kitchen, and thence strolled out into the fields regardless of the driving snow. The brothers were dearly fond of each other, although they were very different in character. Will, the elder, was like his father, stern, reserved and scrupulously upright. Tom (who was ten years younger) was gentle and delicate as a girl, both in appearance and character. He had always clung to his mother and dreaded his father. They did not speak as they walked, for they were only in the habit of talking about facts, and hardly knew the more sophisticated language applied to the description of feelings.

Meanwhile their mother had taken hold of Samuel Orme's arm with her trembling hand.

"Samuel, I must let the farm—I must."

"Let the farm! What's come o'er the woman?"

"Oh, Samuel!" said she, her eyes swimming in tears, "I'm just fain to go and live in Manchester. I mun let the farm."

Samuel looked, and pondered, but did not speak for some time. At last he said—

"If thou hast made up thy mind, there's no speaking again it; and thou must e'en go. Thou'lt be sadly potted wif Manchester ways; but that's not my look-out. Why, thou'lt have to buy potatoes, a thing thou hast never done afore in all thy born life. Well! it's not my look-out. It's rather for me than again me. Our Jenny is going to be married to Tom Higginbotham, and he was speaking of wanting a bit of land to begin upon. His father will be dying sometime, I reckon, and then he'll step into the Croft Farm. But meanwhile"—

"Then, thou'lt let the farm," said she, still as eagerly as ever.

"Ay, ay, be'll take it fast enough, I've a notion. But I'll not drive a bargain with thee just now; it would not be right; we'll wait a bit."

"No; I cannot wait; settle it out at once."

"Well, well; I'll speak to Will about it. I see him out yonder. I'll step to him and talk it over."

Accordingly he went and joined the two lads, and, without more ado, began the subject to them.

"Will, thy mother is fain to go live in Manchester, and covets to let the farm. Now, I'm willing to take it for Tom Higginbotham; but I like to drive a keen bargain, and there would be no fun chaffering with thy mother just now. Let thee and me buckle to, my lad! and try and cheat each other; it will warm us this cold day."

"Let the farm!" said both the lads at once, with infinite surprise. "Go live in Manchester!"

When Samuel Orme found that the plan had never before been named to either Will or Tom, he would have nothing to do with it, he said, until they had spoken to their mother. Likely she was "dazed" by her husband's death; he would wait a day or two, and not name it to any one; not to Tom Higginbotham himself, or may be he would set his heart upon it. The lads had better go in and talk it over with their mother. He bade them good day, and left them.

Will looked very gloomy, but he did not speak till they got near the house. Then he said—

"Tom, go to th' shippon, and supper the cows. I want to speak to mother alone."

When he entered the house-place, she was sitting before the fire, looking into its embers. She did not hear him come in: for some time she had lost her quick perception of outward things.

"Mother! what's this about going to Manchester?" asked he.

"Oh, lad!" said she, turning round, and speaking in a beseeching tone, "I must go and seek our Lizzie. I cannot rest here for thinking on her. Many's the time I've left thy father sleeping in bed, and stole to th' window, and looked and looked my heart out towards Manchester, till I thought I must just set out and tramp over moor and moss straight away till I got there,

and then lift up every downcast face till I came to our Lizzie. And often, when the south wind was blowing soft among the hollows, I've fancied (it could but be fancy, thou knowest) I heard her crying upon me; and I've thought the voice came closer and closer, till at last it was sobbing out, 'Mother!' close to the door; and I've stolen down, and undone the latch before now, and looked out into the still, black night, thinking to see her—and turned sick and sorrowful when I heard no living sound but the sigh of the wind dying away. Oh, speak not to me of stopping here, when she may be perishing for hunger, like the poor lad in the parable." And now she lifted up her voice, and wept aloud.

Will was deeply grieved. He had been old enough to be told the family shame when, more than two years before, his father had had his letter to his daughter returned by her mistress in Manchester, telling him that Lizzie had left her service some time—and why. He had sympathised with his father's stern anger; though he had thought him something hard, it is true, when he had forbidden his weeping, heart-broken wife to go and try to find her poor sinning child, and declared that henceforth they would have no daughter; that she should be as one dead, and her name never more be named at market or at meal time, in blessing or in prayer. He had held his peace, with compressed lips and contracted brow, when the neighbours had noticed to him how poor Lizzie's death had aged both his father and his mother; and how they thought the bereaved couple would never hold up their heads again. He himself had felt as if that one event had made him old before his time; and had envied Tom the tears he had shed over poor, pretty, innocent, dead Lizzie. He thought about her sometimes, till he ground his teeth together, and could have struck her down in her shame. His mother had never named her to him until now.

"Mother!" said he, at last. "She may be dead; most likely she is."

"No, Will; she is not dead," said Mrs. Leigh. "God will not let her die till I've seen her once again. Thou dost not know how I've prayed and prayed just once again to see her sweet face, and tell her I've forgiven her, though she's broken my heart—she has, Will." She could not go on for a minute or two for the choking sobs. "Thou dost not know that, or thou wouldst not say she could be dead—for God is very

merciful, Will ; He is : He is much more pitiful than man. I could never ha' spoken to thy father as I did to Him—and yet thy father forgave her at last. The last words he said were that he forgave her. Thou'lt not be harder than thy father, Will? Do not try and hinder me going to seek her, for it's no use."

Will sat very still for a long time before he spoke. At last he said, "I'll not hinder you. I think she's dead, but that's no matter."

"She's not dead," said her mother, with low earnestness. Will took no notice of the interruption.

"We will all go to Manchester for a twelvemonth, and let the farm to Tom Higginbotham. I'll get blacksmith's work ; and Tom can have good schooling for awhile, which he's always craving for. At the end of the year you'll come back, mother, and give over fretting for Lizzie, and think with me that she is dead—and, to my mind, that would be more comfort than to think of her living ;" he dropped his voice as he spoke these last words. She shook her head, but made no answer. He asked again—

"Will you, mother, agree to this?"

"I'll agree to it a-this-ns," said she. "If I hear and see nought of her for a twelvemonth, me being in Manchester looking out, I'll just ha' broken my heart fairly before the year's ended, and then I shall know neither love nor sorrow for her any more, when I'm at rest in my grave. I'll agree to that, Will."

"Well, I suppose it must be so. I shall not tell Tom, mother, why we're flitting to Manchester. Best spare him."

"As thou wilt," said she sadly, "so that we go, that's all."

Before the wild daffodils were in flower in the sheltered copses round Upclose Farm, the Leighs were settled in their Manchester home ; if they could ever grow to consider that place as a home, where there was no garden or outbuilding, no fresh breezy outlet, no far-stretching view, over moor and hollow ; no dumb animals to be tended, and, what more than all they missed, no old haunting memories, even though those remembrances told of sorrow, and the dead and gone.

Mrs. Leigh heeded the loss of all these things less than her sons. She had more spirit in her countenance than she had had for months, because now she had hope ; of a sad enough

kind, to be sure, but still it was hope. She performed all her household duties, strange and complicated as they were, and bewildered as she was with all the town necessities of her new manner of life; but when her house was "sided," and the boys come home from their work in the evening, she would put on her things and steal out, unnoticed, as she thought, but not without many a heavy sigh from Will, after she had closed the house-door and departed. It was often past midnight before she came back, pale and weary, with almost a guilty look upon her face; but that face so full of disappointment and hope deferred, that Will had never the heart to say what he thought of the folly and hopelessness of the search. Night after night it was renewed, till days grew to weeks, and weeks to months. All this time Will did his duty towards her as well as he could, without having sympathy with her. He stayed at home in the evenings for Tom's sake, and often wished he had Tom's pleasure in reading, for the time hung heavy on his hands as he sat up for his mother.

I need not tell you how the mother spent the weary hours And yet I will tell you something. She used to wander out, at first as if without a purpose, till she rallied her thoughts, and brought all her energies to bear on the one point; then she went with earnest patience along the least-known ways to some new part of the town, looking wistfully with dumb entreaty into people's faces; sometimes catching a glimpse of a figure which had a kind of momentary likeness to her child's, and following that figure with never-wearying perseverance, till some light from shop or lamp showed the cold strange face which was not her daughter's. Once or twice a kind-hearted passer-by, struck by her look of yearning woe, turned back and offered help, or asked her what she wanted. When so spoken to, she answered only, "You don't know a poor girl they call Lizzie Leigh, do you?" and when they denied all knowledge, she shook her head, and went on again. I think they believed her to be crazy. But she never spoke first to any one. She sometimes took a few minutes' rest on the door-steps, and sometimes (very seldom) covered her face and cried; but she could not afford to lose time and chances in this way; while her eyes were blinded with tears, the lost one might pass by unseen.

One evening, in the rich time of shortening autumn days, Will saw an old man, who, without being absolutely drunk,

could not guide himself rightly along the foot-path, and was mocked for his unsteadiness of gait by the idle boys of the neighbourhood. For his father's sake, Will regarded old age with tenderness, even when most degraded and removed from the stern virtues which dignified that father; so he took the old man home, and seemed to believe his often-repeated assertions, that he drank nothing but water. The stranger tried to stiffen himself up into steadiness as he drew nearer home, as if there was some one there for whose respect he cared even in his half-intoxicated state, or whose feelings he feared to grieve. His home was exquisitely clean and neat, even in outside appearance; threshold, window, and window-sill were outward signs of some spirit of purity within. Will was rewarded for his attention by a bright glance of thanks, succeeded by a blush of shame, from a young woman of twenty or thereabouts. She did not speak or second her father's hospitable invitations to him to be seated. She seemed unwilling that a stranger should witness her father's attempts at stately sobriety, and Will could not bear to stay and see her distress. But when the old man, with many a flabby shake of the hand, kept asking him to come again some other evening, and see them, Will sought her down-cast eyes, and, though he could not read their veiled meaning, he answered timidly, "If it's agreeable to everybody, I'll come, and thank ye." But there was no answer from the girl, to whom this speech was in reality addressed; and Will left the house, liking her all the better for never speaking.

He thought about her a great deal for the next day or two; he scolded himself for being so foolish as to think of her, and then fell to with fresh vigour, and thought of her more than ever. He tried to depreciate her: he told himself she was not pretty, and then made indignant answer that he liked her looks much better than any beauty of them all. He wished he was not so country-looking, so red-faced, so broad-shouldered; while she was like a lady, with her smooth, colourless complexion, her bright dark hair, and her spotless dress. Pretty or not pretty she drew his footsteps towards her; he could not resist the impulse that made him wish to see her once more, and find out some fault which should unloose his heart from her unconscious keeping. But there she was, pure and maidenly as before. He sat and looked, answering her father at cross-purposes, while she drew more and more into the shadow of the chimney-corner

out of sight. Then the spirit that possessed him (it was not he himself, sure, that did so impudent a thing!) made him get up and carry the candle to a different place, under the pretence of giving her more light at her sewing, but in reality to be able to see her better. She could not stand this much longer, but jumped up and said she must put her little niece to bed; and surely there never was, before or since, so troublesome a child of two years old, for though Will stayed an hour and a half longer, she never came down again. He won the father's heart, though, by his capacity as a listener; for some people are not at all particular, and, so that they themselves may talk on undisturbed, are not so unreasonable as to expect attention to what they say.

Will did gather this much, however, from the old man's talk. He had once been quite in a genteel line of business, but had failed for more money than any greengrocer he had heard of; at least, any who did not mix up fish and game with greengrocery proper. This grand failure seemed to have been the event of his life, and one on which he dwelt with a strange kind of pride. It appeared as if at present he rested from his past exertions (in the bankrupt line), and depended on his daughter, who kept a small school for very young children. But all these particulars Will only remembered and understood when he had left the house; at the time he heard them, he was thinking of Susan. After he had made good his footing at Mr. Palmer's, he was not long, you may be sure, without finding some reason for returning again and again. He listened to her father, he talked to the little niece, but he looked at Susan, both while he listened and while he talked. Her father kept on insisting upon his former gentility, the details of which would have appeared very questionable to Will's mind, if the sweet, delicate, modest Susan had not thrown an inexplicable air of refinement over all she came near. She never spoke much; she was generally diligently at work; but when she moved it was so noiselessly, and when she did speak, it was in so low and soft a voice, that silence, speech, motion, and stillness alike seemed to remove her high above Will's reach into some saintly and inaccessible air of glory—high above his reach, even as she knew him! And, if she were made acquainted with the dark secret behind of his sister's shame, which was kept ever present to his mind by his mother's nightly

search among the outcast and forsaken, would not Susan shrink away from him with loathing, as if he were tainted by the involuntary relationship? This was his dread; and thereupon followed a resolution that he would withdraw from her sweet company before it was too late. So he resisted internal temptation, and stayed at home, and suffered and sighed. He became angry with his mother for her untiring patience in seeking for one who he could not help hoping was dead rather than alive. He spoke sharply to her, and received only such sad deprecatory answers as made him reproach himself, and still more lose sight of peace of mind. This struggle could not last long without affecting his health; and Tom, his sole companion through the long evenings, noticed his increasing languor, his restless irritability, with perplexed anxiety, and at last resolved to call his mother's attention to his brother's haggard, careworn looks. She listened with a startled recollection of Will's claims upon her love. She noticed his decreasing appetite and half-checked sighs.

"Will, lad! what's come o'er thee?" said she to him, as he sat listlessly gazing into the fire.

"There's nought the matter with me," said he, as if annoyed at her remark.

"Nay, lad, but there is." He did not speak again to contradict her; indeed, she did not know if he had heard her, so unmoved did he look.

"Wouldst like to go to Upclose Farm?" asked she sorrowfully.

"It's just blackberrying time," said Tom.

Will shook his head. She looked at him awhile, as if trying to read that expression of despondency, and trace it back to its source.

"Will and Tom could go," said she, "I must stay here till I've found her, thou knowest," continued she, dropping her voice.

He turned quickly round, and with the authority he at all times exercised over Tom, bade him begone to bed.

When Tom had left the room, he prepared to speak.



CHAPTER II.

"MOTHER," then said Will, "why will you keep on thinking she's alive? If she were but dead, we need never name her name again. We've never heard nought on her since father wrote her that letter; we never knew whether she got it or not. She'd left her place before then. Many a one dies in"—

"Oh, my lad! dunnot speak so to me, or my heart will break outright," said his mother, with a sort of cry. Then she calmed herself, for she yearned to persuade him to her own belief. "Thou never asked, and thou'rt too like thy father for me to tell without asking—but it were all to be near Lizzie's old place that I settled down on this side o' Manchester; and the very day at after we came, I went to her old missus, and asked to speak a word wi' her. I had a strong mind to cast it up to her, that she should ha' sent my poor lass away, without telling on it to us first; but she were in black, and looked so sad I could na' find in my heart to threep it up. But I did ask her a bit about our Lizzie. The master would have turned her away at a day's warning (he's gone to t'other place; I hope he'll meet wi' more mercy there than he showed our Lizzie—I do), and when the missus asked her should she write to us, she says Lizzie shook her head; and when she speered at her again, the poor lass went down on her knees, and begged her not, for she said it would break my heart (as it has done, Will—God knows it has)," said the poor mother, choking with her struggle to keep down her hard overmastering grief, "and her father would curse her—Oh, God, teach me to be patient." She could not speak for a few minutes—"and the lass threatened, and said she'd go drown herself in the canal, if the missus wrote home—and so—"

"Well! I'd got a trace of my child—the missus thought she'd gone to the workhouse to be nursed; and there I went—and there, sure enough, she had been—and they'd turned her out as she were strong, and told her she were young enough to work—but whatten kind o' work would be open to her, lad, and her baby to keep?"

Will listened to his mother's tale with deep sympathy, not

unmixed with the old bitter shame. But the opening of her heart had unlocked his, and after a while he spoke—

“Mother! I think I'd e'en better go home. Tom can stay wi' thee. I know I should stay too, but I cannot stay in peace so near—her—without craving to see her—Susan Palmer, I mean.”

“Has the old Mr. Palmer thou telled me on a daughter?” asked Mrs. Leigh.

“Ay, he has. And I love her above a bit. And it's because I love her I want to leave Manchester. That's all.”

Mrs. Leigh tried to understand this speech for some time, but found it difficult of interpretation.

“Why shouldst thou not tell her thou lov'st her? Thou'rt a likely lad, and sure o' work. Thou'lt have Upclose at my death; and as for that, I could let thee have it now, and keep mysel' by doing a bit of charing. It seems to me a very backwards sort o' way of winning her to think of leaving Manchester.”

“Oh, mother, she's so gentle and so good—she's downright holy. She's never known a touch of sin; and can I ask her to marry me, knowing what we do about Lizzie, and fearing worse? I doubt if one like her could ever care for me; but if she knew about my sister, it would put a gulf between us, and she'd shudder up at the thought of crossing it. You don't know how good she is, mother!”

“Will, Will! if she's so good as thou say'st, she'll have pity on such as my Lizzie. If she has no pity for such, she's a cruel Pharisee, and thou'rt best without her.”

But he only shook his head and sighed; and for the time the conversation dropped.

But a new idea sprang up in Mrs. Leigh's head. She thought that she would go and see Susan Palmer, and speak up for Will, and tell her the truth about Lizzie; and according to her pity for the poor sinner, would she be worthy or unworthy of him. She resolved to go the very next afternoon, but without telling any one of her plan. Accordingly she looked out the Sunday clothes she had never before had the heart to unpack since she came to Manchester, but which she now desired to appear in, in order to do credit to Will. She put on her old-fashioned black mode bonnet, trimmed with real lace; her scarlet cloth cloak, which she had had ever since

she was married; and, always spotlessly clean, she set forth on her unauthorised embassy. She knew the Palmers lived in Crown Street, though where she had heard it she could not tell; and modestly asking her way, she arrived in the street about a quarter to four o'clock. She stopped to inquire the exact number, and the woman whom she addressed told her that Susan Palmer's school would not be loosed till four, and asked her to step in and wait until then at her house.

"For," said she, smiling, "them that wants Susan Palmer wants a kind friend of ours; so we, in a manner, call cousins. Sit down, missus, sit down. I'll wipe the chair, so that it shanna dirty your cloak. My mother used to wear them bright cloaks, and they're right gradely things again a green field."

"Han ye known Susan Palmer long?" asked Mrs. Leigh, pleased with the admiration of her cloak.

"Ever since they comed to live in our street. Our Sally goes to her school."

"Whatten sort of a lass is she, for I ha' never seen her?"

"Well, as for looks, I cannot say. It's so long since I first knowed her, that I've clean forgotten what I thought of her then. My master says he never saw such a smile for gladdening the heart. But may be it's not looks you're asking about. The best thing I can say of her looks is, that she's just one a stranger would stop in the street to ask help from if he needed it. All the little childer creeps as close as they can to her; she'll have as many as three or four hanging to her apron all at once."

"Is she cocket at all?"

"Cocket, bless you! you never saw a creature less set up in all your life. Her father's cocket enough. No! she's not cocket any way. You've not heard much of Susan Palmer, I reckon, if you think she's cocket. She's just one to come quietly in, and do the very thing most wanted; little things, may be, that any one could do, but that few would think on, for another. She'll bring her thimble wi' her, and mend up after the childer o' nights; and she writes all Betty Harker's letters to her grand-child out at service; and she's in nobody's way, and that's a great matter, I take it. Here's the childer running past! School is loosed. You'll find her now, missus, ready to hear and to

help. But we none on us frab her by going near her in school-time."

Poor Mrs. Leigh's heart began to beat, and she could almost have turned round and gone home again. Her country breeding had made her shy of strangers, and this Susan Palmer appeared to her like a real born lady by all accounts. So she knocked with a timid feeling at the indicated door, and when it was opened, dropped a simple curtsey without speaking. Susan had her little niece in her arms, curled up with fond endearment against her breast, but she put her gently down to the ground, and instantly placed a chair in the best corner of the room for Mrs. Leigh, when she told her who she was. "It's not Will as has asked me to come," said the mother apologetically; "I'd a wish just to speak to you myself!"

Susan coloured up to her temples, and stooped to pick up the little toddling girl. In a minute or two Mrs. Leigh began again.

"Will thinks you would na respect us if you knew all; but I think you could na help feeling for us in the sorrow God has put upon us; so I just put on my bonnet, and came off unknowst to the lads. Every one says you're very good, and that the Lord has keeped you from falling from His ways; but may be you've never yet been tried and tempted as some is. I'm perhaps speaking too plain, but my heart's welly broken, and I can't be choice in my words as them who are happy can. Well now! I'll tell you the truth. Will dreads you to hear it, but I'll just tell it you. You mun know"—but here the poor woman's words failed her, and she could do nothing but sit rocking herself backwards and forwards, with sad eyes, straight gazing into Susan's face, as if they tried to tell the tale of agony which the quivering lips refused to utter. Those wretched, stony eyes forced the tears down Susan's cheeks, and, as if this sympathy gave the mother strength, she went on in a low voice—"I had a daughter once, my heart's darling. Her father thought I made too much on her, and that she'd grow marred staying at home; so he said she mun go among strangers and learn to rough it. She were young, and liked the thought of seeing a bit of the world; and her father heard on a place in Manchester. Well! I'll not weary you. That poor girl were led astray; and first thing we heard on it, was when a letter of her father's was sent back by her missus, saying she'd left her

place, or, to speak right, the master had turned her into the street soon as he had heard of her condition—and she not seventeen !”

She now cried aloud ; and Susan wept too. The little child looked up into their faces, and, catching their sorrow, began to whimper and wail. Susan took it softly up, and hiding her face in its little neck, tried to restrain her tears, and think of comfort for the mother. At last she said—

“ Where is she now ? ”

“ Lass ! I dunnot know,” said Mrs. Leigh, checking her sobs to communicate this addition to her distress. “ Mrs. Lomax telled me she went ”——

“ Mrs. Lomax—what Mrs. Lomax ? ”

“ Her as lives in Brabazon Street. She telled me my poor wench went to the workhouse fra there. I'll not speak again the dead ; but if her father would but ha' letten me—but he were one who had no notion—no, I'll not say that ; best say nought. He forgave her on his death-bed. I dare say I did na go th' right way to work.”

“ Will you hold the child for me one instant ? ” said Susan.

“ Ay, if it will come to me. Childer used to be fond on me till I got the sad look on my face that scares them, I think.”

But the little girl clung to Susan ; so she carried it upstairs with her. Mrs. Leigh sat by herself—how long she did not know.

Susan came down with a bundle of far-worn baby clothes.

“ You must listen to me a bit, and not think too much about what I'm going to tell you. Nanny is not my niece, nor any kin to me, that I know of. I used to go out working by the day. One night as I came home, I thought some woman was following me ; I turned to look. The woman, before I could see her face (for she turned it to one side), offered me something. I held out my arms by instinct ; she dropped a bundle into them, with a bursting sob that went straight to my heart. It was a baby. I looked round again ; but the woman was gone. She had run away as quick as lightning. There was a little packet of clothes—very few—and as if they were made out of its mother's gowns, for they were large patterns to buy for a baby. I was always fond of babies ; and I had not my wits about me,

father says ; for it was very cold, and when I'd seen as well as I could (for it was past ten) that there was no one in the street, I brought it in and warmed it. Father was very angry when he came, and said he'd take it to the workhouse the next morning, and flyted me sadly about it. But when morning came I could not bear to part with it ; it had slept in my arms all night ; and I've heard what workhouse bringing-up is. So I told father I'd give up going out working, and stay at home and keep school, if I might only keep the baby ; and, after a while, he said if I earned enough for him to have his comforts, he'd let me ; but he's never taken to her. Now, don't tremble so—I've but a little more to tell—and may be I'm wrong in telling it ; but I used to work next door to Mrs. Lomax's, in Brabazon Street, and the servants were all thick together ; and I heard about Bessy (they called her) being sent away. I don't know that ever I saw her ; but the time would be about fitting to this child's age, and I've sometimes fancied it was hers. And now, will you look at the little clothes that came with her—bless her !”

But Mrs. Leigh had fainted. The strange joy and shame, and gushing love for the little child, had overpowered her ; it was some time before Susan could bring her round. There she was all trembling, sick with impatience to look at the little frocks. Among them was a slip of paper which Susan had forgotten to name, that had been pinned to the bundle. On it was scrawled, in a round, stiff hand—

“Call her Anne. She does not cry much, and takes a deal of notice. God bless you, and forgive me.”

The writing was no clue at all ; the name “Anne,” common though it was, seemed something to build upon. But Mrs. Leigh recognised one of the frocks instantly, as being made out of a part of a gown that she and her daughter had bought together in Rochdale.

She stood up, and stretched out her hands in the attitude of blessing over Susan's bent head.

“God bless you, and show you His mercy in your need, as you have shown it to this little child.”

She took the little creature in her arms, and smoothed away her sad looks to a smile, and kissed it fondly, saying over and over again, “Nanny, Nanny, my little Nanny.”

At last the child was soothed, and looked in her face and smiled back again.

"It has her eyes," said she to Susan.

"I never saw her to the best of my knowledge. I think it must be hers by the frock. But where can she be?"

"God knows," said Mrs. Leigh; "I dare not think she's dead. I'm sure she isn't."

"No; she's not dead. Every now and then a little packet is thrust in under our door, with, may be, two half-crowns in it; once it was half-a-sovereign. Altogether I've got seven-and-thirty shillings wrapped up for Nanny. I never touch it, but I've often thought the poor mother feels near to God when she brings this money. Father wanted to set the policeman to watch, but I said No; for I was afraid if she was watched she might not come, and it seemed such a holy thing to be checking her in, I could not find in my heart to do it."

"Oh, if we could but find her! I'd take her in my arms, and we'd just lie down and die together."

"Nay, don't speak so!" said Susan gently; "for all that's come and gone, she may turn right at last. Mary Magdalen did, you know."

"Eh! but I were nearer right about thee than Will. He thought you would never look on him again if you knew about Lizzie. But thou'rt not a Pharisee."

"I'm sorry he thought I could be so hard," said Susan, in a low voice, and colouring up. Then Mrs. Leigh was alarmed, and, in her motherly anxiety, she began to fear lest she had injured Will in Susan's estimation.

"You see Will thinks so much of you—gold would not be good enough for you to walk on, in his eye. He said you'd never look at him as he was, let alone his being brother to my poor wench. He loves you so, it makes him think meanly on everything belonging to himself, as not fit to come near ye; but he's a good lad, and a good son. Thou'lt be a happy woman if thou'lt have him, so don't let my words go against him—don't!"

But Susan hung her head, and made no answer. She had not known until now that Will thought so earnestly and seriously about her; and even now she felt afraid that Mrs. Leigh's words promised her too much happiness, and that

they could not be true. At any rate, the instinct of modesty made her shrink from saying anything which might seem like a confession of her own feelings to a third person. Accordingly she turned the conversation on the child.

"I am sure he could not help loving Nanny," said she. "There never was such a good little darling; don't you think she'd win his heart if he knew she was his niece, and perhaps bring him to think kindly on his sister?"

"I dunnot know," said Mrs. Leigh, shaking her head. "He has a turn in his eye like his father, that makes me—— He's right down good though. But, you see, I've never been a good one at managing folk; one severe look turns me sick, and then I say just the wrong thing, I'm so fluttered. Now I should like nothing better than to take Nancy home with me, but Tom knows nothing but that his sister is dead, and I've not the knack of speaking rightly to Will. I dare not do it, and that's the truth. But you mun not think badly of Will. He's so good hissel, that he can't understand how any one can do wrong; and, above all, I'm sure he loves you dearly."

"I don't think I could part with Nancy," said Susan, anxious to stop this revelation of Will's attachment to herself. "He'll come round to her soon; he can't fail; and I'll keep a sharp look-out after the poor mother, and try and catch her the next time she comes with her little parcels of money."

"Ay, lass; we mun get hold of her; my Lizzie. I love thee dearly for thy kindness to her child; but if thou canst catch her for me, I'll pray for thee when I'm too near my death to speak words; and, while I live, I'll serve thee next to her—she mun come first, thou know'st. God bless thee, lass. My heart is lighter by a deal than it was when I comed in. Them lads will be looking for me home, and I mun go, and leave this little sweet one" (kissing it). "If I can take courage, I'll tell Will all that has come and gone between us two. He may come and see thee, mayn't he?"

"Father will be very glad to see him, I'm sure," replied Susan. The way in which this was spoken satisfied Mrs. Leigh's anxious heart that she had done Will no harm by what she had said; and, with many a kiss to the little one, and one more fervent tearful blessing on Susan, she went homewards.

CHAPTER III.

THAT night Mrs. Leigh stopped at home—that only night for many months. Even Tom, the scholar, looked up from his books in amazement; but then he remembered that Will had not been well, and that his mother's attention having been called to the circumstance, it was only natural she should stay to watch him. And no watching could be more tender, or more complete. Her loving eyes seemed never averted from his face—his grave, sad, careworn face. When Tom went to bed the mother left her seat, and going up to Will, where he sat looking at the fire, but not seeing it, she kissed his forehead, and said—

“Will! lad, I've been to see Susan Palmer!”

She felt the start under her hand which was placed on his shoulder, but he was silent for a minute or two. Then he said—

“What took you there, mother?”

“Why, my lad, it was likely I should wish to see one you cared for; I did not put myself forward. I put on my Sunday clothes, and tried to behave as yo'd ha' liked me. At least, I remember trying at first; but after, I forgot all.”

She rather wished that he would question her as to what made her forget all. But he only said—

“How was she looking, mother?”

“Well, thou seest I never set eyes on her before; but she's a good, gentle-looking creature; and I love her dearly, as I've reason to.”

Will looked up with momentary surprise, for his mother was too shy to be usually taken with strangers. But, after all, it was natural in this case, for who could look at Susan without loving her? So still he did not ask any questions, and his poor mother had to take courage, and try again to introduce the subject near to her heart. But how?

“Will!” said she (jerking it out in sudden despair of her own powers to lead to what she wanted to say), “I telled her all.”

“Mother! you've ruined me,” said he, standing up, and

standing opposite to her with a stern white look of affright on his face.

"No! my own dear lad; dunnot look so scared; I have not ruined you!" she exclaimed, placing her two hands on his shoulders, and looking fondly into his face. "She's not one to harden her heart against a mother's sorrow. My own lad, she's too good for that. She's not one to judge and scorn the sinner. She's too deep read in her New Testament for that. Take courage, Will; and thou may'st, for I watched her well, though it is not for one woman to let out another's secret. Sit thee down, lad, for thou look'st very white."

He sat down. His mother drew a stool towards him, and sat at his feet.

"Did you tell her about Lizzie, then?" asked he, hoarse and low.

"I did; I telled her all! and she fell a-crying over my deep sorrow, and the poor wench's sin. And then a light comed into her face, trembling and quivering with some new glad thought; and what dost thou think it was, Will, lad? Nay, I'll not misdoubt but that thy heart will give thanks as mine did, afore God and His angels, for her great goodness. That little Nanny is not her niece, she's our Lizzie's own child, my little grandchild." She could no longer restrain her tears; and they fell hot and fast, but still she looked into his face.

"Did she know it was Lizzie's child? I do not comprehend," said he, flushing red.

"She knows now; she did not at first, but took the little helpless creature in, out of her own pitiful, loving heart, guessing only that it was the child of shame; and she's worked for it, and kept it, and tended it ever sin' it were a mere baby, and loves it fondly. Will! won't you love it?" asked she beseechingly.

He was silent for an instant; then he said, "Mother, I'll try. Give me time, for all these things startle me. To think of Susan havin' to do with such a child!"

"Ay, Will! and to think, as may be yet, of Susan havin' to do with the child's mother! For she is tender and pitiful, and speaks hopefully of my lost one, and will try and find her for me, when she comes, as she does sometimes, to thrust money under the door, for her baby. Think of that, Will. Here's Susan, good and pure as the angels in heaven, yet,

like them, full of hope and mercy, and one who, like them, will rejoice over her as repents. Will, my lad, I'm not afraid of you now; and I must speak, and you must listen. I am your mother, and I dare to command you, because I know I am in the right, and that God is on my side. If He should lead the poor wandering lassie to Susan's door, and she comes back, crying and sorrowful, led by that good angel to us once more, thou shalt never say a casting-up word to her about her sin, but be tender and helpful towards one 'who was lost and is found;' so may God's blessing rest on thee, and so may'st thou lead Susan home as thy wife."

She stood no longer as the meek, imploring, gentle mother, but firm and dignified, as if the interpreter of God's will. Her manner was so unusual and solemn, that it overcame all Will's pride and stubbornness. He rose softly while she was speaking, and bent his head, as if in reverence at her words, and the solemn injunction which they conveyed. When she had spoken, he said, in so subdued a voice that she was almost surprised at the sound, "Mother, I will."

"I may be dead and gone; but, all the same, thou wilt take home the wandering sinner, and heal up her sorrows, and lead her to her Father's house. My lad, I can speak no more; I'm turned very faint."

He placed her in a chair; he ran for water. She opened her eyes, and smiled.

"God bless you, Will. Oh! I am so happy. It seems as if she were found; my heart is so filled with gladness."

That night Mr. Palmer stayed out late and long. Susan was afraid that he was at his old haunts and habits—getting tipsy at some public-house; and this thought oppressed her, even though she had so much to make her happy in the consciousness that Will loved her. She sat up long, and then she went to bed, leaving all arranged as well as she could for her father's return. She looked at the little rosy, sleeping girl who was her bed-fellow, with redoubled tenderness, and with many a prayerful thought. The little arms entwined her neck as she lay down, for Nanny was a light sleeper, and was conscious that she, who was loved with all the power of that sweet, childish heart, was near her, and by her, although she was too sleepy to utter any of her half-formed words.

And, by-and-by, she heard her father come home, stumbling

uncertain, trying first the windows, and next the door-fastenings, with many a loud incoherent murmur. The little innocent twined around her seemed all the sweeter and more lovely, when she thought sadly of her erring father. And presently he called aloud for a light. She had left matches and all arranged as usual on the dresser; but, fearful of some accident from fire, in his unusually intoxicated state, she now got up softly, and putting on a cloak, went down to his assistance.

Alas! the little arms that were unclosed from her soft neck belonged to a light, easily-awakened sleeper. Nanny missed her darling Susy; and terrified at being left alone, in the vast mysterious darkness, which had no bounds and seemed infinite, she slipped out of bed, and tottered, in her little nightgown, towards the door. There was a light below, and there was Susy and safety! So she went onwards two steps towards the steep, abrupt stairs; and then, dazzled by sleepiness, she stood, she wavered, she fell! Down on her head on the stone floor she fell! Susan flew to her, and spoke all soft, entreating, loving words; but her white lids covered up the blue violets of eyes, and there was no murmur came out of the pale lips. The warm tears that rained down did not awaken her; she lay stiff, and weary with her short life, on Susan's knee. Susan went sick with terror. She carried her upstairs, and laid her tenderly in bed; she dressed herself most hastily, with her trembling fingers. Her father was asleep on the settle downstairs; and useless, and worse than useless, if awake. But Susan flew out of the door, and down the quiet resounding street, towards the nearest doctor's house. Quickly she went, but as quickly a shadow followed, as if impelled by some sudden terror. Susan rang wildly at the nightbell—the shadow crouched near. The doctor looked out from an upstairs window.

"A little child has fallen downstairs, at No. 9 Crown Street, and is very ill—dying, I'm afraid. Please, for God's sake, sir, come directly. No. 9 Crown Street."

"I'll be there directly," said he, and shut the window.

"For that God you have just spoken about—for His sake—tell me, are you Susan Palmer? Is it my child that lies a-dying?" said the shadow, springing forwards, and clutching poor Susan's arm.

"It is a little child of two years old. I do not know whose it is; I love it as my own. Come with me, whoever you are; come with me."

The two sped along the silent streets—as silent as the night were they. They entered the house; Susan snatched up the light, and carried it upstairs. The other followed.

She stood with wild, glaring eyes by the bedside, never looking at Susan, but hungrily gazing at the little, white, still child. She stooped down, and put her hand tight on her own heart, as if to still its beating, and bent her ear to the pale lips. Whatever the result was, she did not speak; but threw off the bed-clothes wherewith Susan had tenderly covered up the little creature, and felt its left side.

Then she threw up her arms, with a cry of wild despair.

"She is dead! she is dead!"

She looked so fierce, so mad, so haggard, that, for an instant, Susan was terrified; the next, the holy God had put courage into her heart, and her pure arms were round that guilty, wretched creature, and her tears were falling fast and warm upon her breast. But she was thrown off with violence.

"You killed her—you slighted her—you let her fall down those stairs! you killed her!"

Susan cleared off the thick mist before her, and, gazing at the mother with her clear, sweet angel eyes, said, mournfully—

"I would have laid down my own life for her."

"Oh, the murder is on my soul!" exclaimed the wild, bereaved mother, with the fierce impetuosity of one who has none to love her, and to be beloved, regard to whom might teach self-restraint.

"Hush!" said Susan, her finger on her lips. "Here is the doctor. God may suffer her to live."

The poor mother turned sharp round. The doctor mounted the stair. Ah! that mother was right; the little child was really dead and gone.

And when he confirmed her judgment, the mother fell down in a fit. Susan, with her deep grief, had to forget herself, and forget her darling (her charge for years), and question the doctor what she must do with the poor wretch, who lay on the floor in such extreme of misery.

"She is the mother!" said she.

"Why did she not take better care of her child?" asked he, almost angrily.

But Susan only said, "The little child slept with me; and it was I that left her."

"I will go back and make up a composing draught; and while I am away you must get her to bed."

Susan took out some of her own clothes, and softly undressed the stiff, powerless form. There was no other bed in the house but the one in which her father slept. So she tenderly lifted the body of her darling; and was going to take it downstairs, but the mother opened her eyes, and seeing what she was about, she said—

"I am not worthy to touch her, I am so wicked. I have spoken to you as I never should have spoken; but I think you are very good. May I have my own child to lie in my arms for a little while?"

Her voice was so strange a contrast to what it had been before she had gone into the fit, that Susan hardly recognised it: it was now so unspeakably soft, so irresistibly pleading; the features too had lost their fierce expression, and were almost as placid as death. Susan could not speak, but she carried the little child, and laid it in its mother's arms; then, as she looked at them, something overpowered her, and she knelt down, crying aloud—

"Oh, my God, my God, have mercy on her, and forgive and comfort her."

But the mother kept smiling, and stroking the little face, murmuring soft, tender words, as if it were alive. She was going mad, Susan thought; but she prayed on, and on, and ever still she prayed with streaming eyes.

The doctor came with the draught. The mother took it, with docile unconsciousness of its nature as medicine. The doctor sat by her; and soon she fell asleep. Then he rose softly, and beckoning Susan to the door, he spoke to her there.

"You must take the corpse out of her arms. She will not awake. That draught will make her sleep for many hours. I will call before noon again. It is now daylight. Good-bye."

Susan shut him out; and then, gently extricating the dead child from its mother's arms, she could not resist making her

own quiet moan over her darling. She tried to learn off its little placid face, dumb and pale before her.

“Not all the scalding tears of care
Shall wash away that vision fair;
Not all the thousand thoughts that rise,
Not all the sights that dim her eyes,
Shall e'er usurp the place
Of that little angel-face.”

And then she remembered what remained to be done. She saw that all was right in the house; her father was still dead asleep on the settle, in spite of all the noise of the night. She went out through the quiet streets, deserted still, although it was broad daylight, and to where the Leighs lived. Mrs. Leigh, who kept her country hours, was opening her window-shutters. Susan took her by the arm, and, without speaking, went into the house-place. There she knelt down before the astonished Mrs. Leigh, and cried as she had never done before; but the miserable night had overpowered her, and she who had gone through so much calmly, now that the pressure seemed removed could not find the power to speak.

“My poor dear! What has made thy heart so sore as to come and cry a-this-ons? Speak and tell me. Nay, cry on, poor wench, if thou canst not speak yet. It will ease the heart, and then thou canst tell me.”

“Nanny is dead!” said Susan. “I left her to go to father, and she fell downstairs, and never breathed again. Oh, that’s my sorrow! But I’ve more to tell. Her mother is come—is in our house! Come and see if it’s your Lizzie.”

Mrs. Leigh could not speak, but, trembling, put on her things, and went with Susan in dizzy haste back to Crown Street.

CHAPTER IV.

As they entered the house in Crown Street, they perceived that the door would not open freely on its hinges, and Susan instinctively looked behind to see the cause of the obstruction. She immediately recognised the appearance of a little parcel, wrapped in a scrap of newspaper, and evidently containing money. She stooped and picked it up. "Look!" said she sorrowfully, "the mother was bringing this for her child last night."

But Mrs. Leigh did not answer. So near to the ascertaining if it were her lost child or no, she could not be arrested, but pressed onwards with trembling steps and a beating, fluttering heart. She entered the bedroom, dark and still. She took no heed of the little corpse over which Susan paused, but she went straight to the bed, and, withdrawing the curtain, saw Lizzie; but not the former Lizzie, bright, gay, buoyant, and undimmed. This Lizzie was old before her time; her beauty was gone; deep lines of care, and, alas! of want (or thus the mother imagined) were printed on the cheek, so round, and fair, and smooth, when last she gladdened her mother's eyes. Even in her sleep she bore the look of woe and despair which was the prevalent expression of her face by day; even in her sleep she had forgotten how to smile. But all these marks of the sin and sorrow she had passed through only made her mother love her the more. She stood looking at her with greedy eyes, which seemed as though no gazing could satisfy their longing; and at last she stooped down and kissed the pale, worn hand that lay outside the bedclothes. No touch disturbed the sleeper; the mother need not have laid the hand so gently down upon the counterpane. There was no sign of life, save only now and then a deep sob-like sigh. Mrs. Leigh sat down beside the bed, and still holding back the curtain, looked on and on, as if she could never be satisfied.

Susan would fain have stayed by her darling one; but she had many calls upon her time and thoughts, and her will had now, as ever, to be given up to that of others. All seemed to devolve the burden of their cares on her. Her father, illumoured from his last night's intemperance, did not scruple

to reproach her with being the cause of little Nanny's death; and when, after bearing his upbraiding meekly for some time, she could no longer restrain herself, but began to cry, he wounded her even more by his injudicious attempts at comfort; for he said it was as well the child was dead; it was none of theirs, and why should they be troubled with it? Susan wrung her hands at this, and came and stood before her father, and implored him to forbear. Then she had to take all requisite steps for the coroner's inquest; she had to arrange for the dismissal of her school; she had to summon a little neighbour, and send his willing feet on a message to William Leigh, who, she felt, ought to be informed of his mother's whereabouts, and of the whole state of affairs. She asked her messenger to tell him to come and speak to her; that his mother was at her house. She was thankful that her father sauntered out to have a gossip at the nearest coachstand, and to relate as many of the night's adventures as he knew; for as yet he was in ignorance of the watcher and the watched, who silently passed away the hours upstairs.

At dinner-time Will came. He looked red, glad, impatient, excited. Susan stood calm and white before him, her soft, loving eyes gazing straight into his.

"Will," said she, in a low, quiet voice, "your sister is upstairs."

"My sister!" said he, as if affrighted at the idea, and losing his glad look in one of gloom. Susan saw it, and her heart sank a little, but she went on as calm to all appearance as ever.

"She was little Nanny's mother, as perhaps you know. Poor little Nanny was killed last night by a fall downstairs." All the calmness was gone; all the suppressed feeling was displayed in spite of every effort. She sat down, and hid her face from him, and cried bitterly. He forgot everything but the wish, the longing to comfort her. He put his arm round her waist, and bent over her. But all he could say, was, "Oh, Susan, how can I comfort you? Don't take on so—pray don't!" He never changed the words, but the tone varied every time he spoke. At last she seemed to regain her power over herself; and she wiped her eyes, and once more looked upon him with her own quiet, earnest, unfeeling gaze.

"Your sister was near the house. She came in on hearing my words to the doctor. She is asleep now, and your mother

is watching her. I wanted to tell you all myself. Would you like to see your mother?"

"No!" said he. "I would rather see none but thee. Mother told me thou knew'st all." His eyes were downcast in their shame.

But the holy and pure did not lower or veil her eyes.

She said, "Yes, I know all—all but her sufferings. Think what they must have been!"

He made answer, low and stern, "She deserved them all; every jot."

"In the eye of God, perhaps she does. He is the Judge; we are not."

"Oh!" she said, with a sudden burst, "Will Leigh! I have thought so well of you; don't go and make me think you cruel and hard. Goodness is not goodness unless there is mercy and tenderness with it. There is your mother, who has been nearly heart-broken, now full of rejoicing over her child. Think of your mother."

"I do think of her," said he. "I remember the promise I gave her last night. Thou shouldst give me time. I would do right in time. I never think it o'er in quiet. But I will do what is right and fitting, never fear. Thou hast spoken out very plain to me, and misdoubted me, Susan; I love thee so, that thy words cut me. —If I did hang back a bit from making sudden promises, it was because not even for love of thee, would I say what I was not feeling; and at first I could not feel all at once as thou wouldst have me. But I'm not cruel and hard;—for if I had been, I should na' have grieved as I have done."

He made as if he were going away; and indeed he did feel he would rather think it over in quiet. But Susan, grieved at her incautious words, which had all the appearance of harshness, went a step or two nearer—paused—and then, all over blushes, said in a low, soft whisper—

"Oh, Will! I beg your pardon. I am very sorry. Won't you forgive me?"

She who had always drawn back, and been so reserved, said this in the very softest manner; with eyes now uplifted beseechingly, now dropped to the ground. Her sweet confusion told more than words could do; and Will turned back, all joyous in his certainty of being beloved, and took her in his arms, and kissed her.

"My own Susan!" he said.

Meanwhile the mother watched her child in the room above.

It was late in the afternoon before she awoke, for the sleeping draught had been very powerful. The instant she awoke, her eyes were fixed on her mother's face with a gaze as unflinching as if she were fascinated. Mrs. Leigh did not turn away, nor move; for it seemed as if motion would unlock the stony command over herself which, while so perfectly still, she was enabled to preserve. But by-and-by Lizzie cried out, in a piercing voice of agony—

"Mother, don't look at me! I have been so wicked!" and instantly she hid her face, and grovelled among the bed-clothes, and lay like one dead, so motionless was she.

Mrs. Leigh knelt down by the bed, and spoke in the most soothing tones.

"Lizzie, dear, don't speak so. I'm thy mother, darling; don't be afeard of me. I never left off loving thee, Lizzie. I was always a-thinking of thee. Thy father forgave thee afore he died." (There was a little start here, but no sound was heard.) "Lizzie, lass, I'll do ought for thee; I'll live for thee; only don't be afeard of me. Whate'er thou art or hast been, we'll ne'er speak on't. We'll leave th' oud times behind us, and go back to the Upclose Farm. I but left it to find thee, my lass; and God has led me to thee. Blessed be His name. And God is good, too, Lizzie. Thou hast not forgot thy Bible, I'll be bound, for thou wert always a scholar. I'm no reader, but I learnt off them texts to comfort me a bit, and I've said them many a time a day to myself. Lizzie, lass, don't hide thy head so; it's thy mother as is speaking to thee. Thy little child clung to me only yesterday; and if it's gone to be an angel, it will speak to God for thee. Nay, don't sob a-that-as; thou shalt have it again in heaven; I know thou'lt strive to get there, for thy little Nancy's sake—and listen! I'll tell thee God's promises to them that are penitent—only doan't be afeard."

Mrs. Leigh folded her hands, and strove to speak very clearly, while she repeated every tender and merciful text she could remember. She could tell from the breathing that her daughter was listening; but she was so dizzy and sick herself when she had ended, that she could not go on speaking. It was all she could do to keep from crying aloud.

At last she heard her daughter's voice.

"Where have they taken her to?" she asked.

"She is downstairs. So quiet, and peaceful, and happy she looks."

"Could she speak! Oh, if God—if I might but have heard her little voice! Mother, I used to dream of it. May I see her once again? Oh, mother, if I strive very hard and God is very merciful, and I go to heaven, I shall not know her—I shall not know my own again; she will shun me as a stranger, and cling to Susan Palmer and to you. Oh, woe! Oh, woe!" She shook with exceeding sorrow.

In her earnestness of speech she had uncovered her face, and tried to read Mrs. Leigh's thoughts through her looks. And when she saw those aged eyes brimming full of tears, and marked the quivering lips, she threw her arms round the faithful mother's neck, and wept there as she had done in many a childish sorrow, but with a deeper, a more wretched grief.

Her mother hushed her on her breast; and lulled her as if she were a baby; and she grew still and quiet.

They sat thus for a long, long time. At last, Susan Palmer came up with some tea and bread and butter for Mrs. Leigh. She watched the mother feed her sick, unwilling child, with every fond inducement to eat which she could devise; they neither of them took notice of Susan's presence. That night they lay in each other's arms; but Susan slept on the ground beside them.

They took the little corpse (the little unconscious sacrifice, whose early calling home had reclaimed her poor wandering mother) to the hills, which in her lifetime she had never seen. They dared not lay her by the stern grandfather in Milne Row churchyard, but they bore her to a lone moorland graveyard, where, long ago, the Quakers used to bury their dead. They laid her there on the sunny slope, where the earliest spring flowers blow.

Will and Susan live at the Upclose Farm. Mrs. Leigh and Lizzie dwell in a cottage so secluded that, until you drop into the very hollow where it is placed, you do not see it. Tom is a schoolmaster in Rochdale, and he and Will help to support their mother. I only know that, if the cottage be hidden in a green hollow of the hills, every sound of sorrow

in the whole upland is heard there—every call of suffering or of sickness for help is listened to by a sad, gentle-looking woman, who rarely smiles (and when she does her smile is more sad than other people's tears), but who comes out of her seclusion whenever there is a shadow in any household. Many hearts bless Lizzie Leigh, but she—she prays always and ever for forgiveness—such forgiveness as may enable her to see her child once more. Mrs. Leigh is quiet and happy. Lizzie is, to her eyes, something precious—as the lost piece of silver—found once more. Susan is the bright one who brings sunshine to all. Children grow around her and call her blessed. One is called Nanny; her Lizzie often takes to the sunny graveyard in the uplands, and while the little creature gathers the daisies, and makes chains, Lizzie sits by a little grave and weeps bitterly.



THE CROOKED BRANCH.



NOT many years after the beginning of this century, a worthy couple of the name of Huntroyd occupied a small farm in the North Riding of Yorkshire. They had married late in life, although they were very young when they first began to "keep company" with each other. Nathan Huntroyd had been farm-servant to Hester Rose's father, and had made up to her at a time when her parents thought she might do better; and so, without much consultation of her feelings, they had dismissed Nathan in somewhat cavalier fashion. He had drifted far away from his former connections, when an uncle of his died, leaving Nathan—by this time upwards of forty years of age—enough money to stock a small farm, and yet have something over to put in the bank against bad times. One of the consequences of this bequest was, that Nathan was looking out for a wife and housekeeper, in a kind of discreet and leisurely way, when one day he heard that his old love, Hester, was—not married and flourishing, as he had always supposed her to be—but a poor maid-of-all-work, in the town of Ripon. For her father had had a succession of misfortunes, which had brought him in his old age to the workhouse; her mother was dead; her only brother struggling to bring up a large family; and Hester herself, a hard-working, homely-looking (at thirty-seven) servant. Nathan had a kind of growling satisfaction (which only lasted a minute or two, however) in hearing of these turns of fortune's wheel. He did not make many intelligible remarks to his informant, and to no one else did he say a word. But a few days afterwards, he presented himself, dressed in his Sunday best, at Mrs. Thompson's back door in Ripon.

Hester stood there, in answer to the good sound knock

his good sound oak-stick made; she with the light full upon her, he in shadow. For a moment there was silence. He was scanning the face and figure of his old love, for twenty years unseen. The comely beauty of youth had faded away entirely; she was, as I have said, homely-looking, plain-featured, but with a clean skin, and pleasant frank eyes. Her figure was no longer round, but tidily draped in a blue and white bedgown, tied round her waist by her white apron-strings, and her short red linsey petticoat showed her tidy feet and ankles. Her former lover fell into no ecstasies. He simply said to himself, "She'll do;" and forthwith began upon his business.

"Hester, thou dost not mind me. I am Nathan, as thy father turned off at a minute's notice, for thinking of thee for a wife, twenty year come Michaelmas next. I have not thought much upon matrimony since. But Uncle Ben has died, leaving me a small matter in the bank; and I have taken Nab-End Farm, and put in a bit of stock, and shall want a missus to see after it. Wilt like to come? I'll not mislead thee. It's dairy, and it might have been arable. But arable takes more horses nor it suited me to buy, and I'd the offer of a tidy lot of kine. That's all. If thou'lt have me, I'll come for thee as soon as the hay is gotten in."

Hester only said, "Come in, and sit thee down."

He came in, and sat down. For a time, she took no more notice of him than of his stick, bustling about to get dinner ready for the family whom she served. He meanwhile watched her brisk, sharp movements, and repeated to himself, "She'll do!" After about twenty minutes of silence thus employed, he got up, saying—

"Well, Hester, I'm going. When shall I come back again?"

"Please thysel', and thou'll please me," said Hester, in a tone that she tried to make light and indifferent; but he saw that her colour came and went, and that she trembled while she moved about. In another moment Hester was soundly kissed; but when she looked round to scold the middle-aged farmer, he appeared so entirely composed that she hesitated. He said—

"I have pleased mysel', and thee too, I hope. Is it a month's wage, and a month's warning? To-day is the eighth. July eighth is our wedding-day. I have no time to spend a-wooing

before then, and wedding must na take long. Two days is enough to throw away, at our time o' life."

It was like a dream; but Hester resolved not to think more about it till her work was done. And when all was cleaned up for the evening, she went and gave her mistress warning, telling her all the history of her life in a very few words. That day month she was married from Mrs. Thompson's house.

The issue of the marriage was one boy, Benjamin. A few years after his birth, Hester's brother died at Leeds, leaving ten or twelve children. Hester sorrowed bitterly over this loss; and Nathan showed her much quiet sympathy, although he could not but remember that Jack Rose had added insult to the bitterness of his youth. He helped his wife to make ready to go by the waggon to Leeds. He made light of the household difficulties, which came thronging into her mind after all was fixed for her departure. He filled her purse, that she might have wherewithal to alleviate the immediate wants of her brother's family. And as she was leaving, he ran after the waggon. "Stop, stop!" he cried. "Hetty, if thou wilt—if it wunnot be too much for thee—bring back one of Jack's wenches for company, like. We've enough and to spare; and a lass will make the house winsome, as a man may say."

The waggon moved on; while Hester had such a silent swelling of gratitude in her heart, as was both thanks to her husband, and thanksgiving to God.

And that was the way that little Bessy Rose came to be an inmate of the Nab's-End Farm.

Virtue met with its own reward in this instance, and in a clear and tangible shape, too, which need not delude people in general into thinking that such is the usual nature of virtue's rewards. Bessy grew up a bright, affectionate, active girl; a daily comfort to her uncle and aunt. She was so much a darling in the household that they even thought her worthy of their only son Benjamin, who was perfection in their eyes. It is not often the case that two plain, homely people have a child of uncommon beauty; but it is so sometimes, and Benjamin Huntroyd was one of these exceptional cases. The hard-working, labour-and-care-marked farmer, and the mother, who could never have been more than tolerably comely in her best days, produced a boy who might have been an earl's son for grace and beauty. Even the hunting squires of the neighbour-

hood reined up their horses to admire him, as he opened the gates for them. He had no shyness, he was so accustomed to admiration from strangers and adoration from his parents from his earliest years. As for Bessy Rose, he ruled imperiously over her heart from the time she first set eyes on him. And as she grew older, she grew on in loving, persuading herself that what her uncle and aunt loved so dearly it was her duty to love dearest of all. At every unconscious symptom of the young girl's love for her cousin, his parents smiled and winked: all was going on as they wished, no need to go far afield for Benjamin's wife. The household could go on as it was now; Nathan and Hester sinking into the rest of years, and relinquishing care and authority to those dear ones, who, in process of time, might bring other dear ones to share their love.

But Benjamin took it all very coolly. He had been sent to a day-school in the neighbouring town—a grammar-school, in the high state of neglect in which the majority of such schools were thirty years ago. Neither his father nor his mother knew much of learning. All they knew (and that directed their choice of a school) was that they could not, by any possibility, part with their darling to a boarding-school; that some schooling he must have, and that Squire Pollard's son went to Highminster Grammar School. Squire Pollard's son, and many another son destined to make his parents' hearts ache, went to this school. If it had not been so utterly bad a place of education, the simple farmer and his wife might have found it out sooner. But not only did the pupils there learn vice, they also learnt deceit. Benjamin was naturally too clever to remain a dunce, or else, if he had chosen so to be, there was nothing in Highminster Grammar School to hinder his being a dunce of the first water. But, to all appearance, he grew clever and gentleman-like. His father and mother were even proud of his airs and graces, when he came home for the holidays; taking them for proofs of his refinement, although the practical effect of such refinement was to make him express his contempt for his parents' homely ways and simple ignorance. By the time he was eighteen, an articled clerk in an attorney's office at Highminster,—for he had quite declined becoming a “mere clodhopper,” that is to say, a hard-working, honest farmer like his father—Bessy Rose was the only person who was dissatisfied with him. The little girl of fourteen instinctively felt there was

something wrong about him. Alas! two years more, and the girl of sixteen worshipped his very shadow, and would not see that aught could be wrong with one so soft-spoken, so handsome, so kind as Cousin Benjamin. For Benjamin had discovered that the way to cajole his parents out of money for every indulgence he fancied, was to pretend to forward their innocent scheme, and make love to his pretty cousin, Bessy Rose. He cared just enough for her to make this work of necessity not disagreeable at the time he was performing it. But he found it tiresome to remember her little claims upon him, when she was no longer present. The letters he had promised her during his weekly absence at Highminster, the trifling commissions she had asked him to do for her, were all considered in the light of troubles; and even when he was with her, he resented the inquiries she made as to his mode of passing his time, or what female acquaintances he had in Highminster.

When his apprenticeship was ended, nothing would serve him but that he must go up to London for a year or two. Poor Farmer Huntroyd was beginning to repent of his ambition of making his son Benjamin a gentleman. But it was too late to repine now. Both father and mother felt this, and, however sorrowful they might be, they were silent, neither demurring nor assenting to Benjamin's proposition when first he made it. But Bessy, through her tears, noticed that both her uncle and aunt seemed unusually tired that night, and sat hand-in-hand on the fireside settle, idly gazing into the bright flame, as if they saw in it pictures of what they had once hoped their lives would have been. Bessy rattled about among the supper things, as she put them away after Benjamin's departure, making more noise than usual—as if noise and bustle was what she needed to keep her from bursting out crying—and, having at one keen glance taken in the position and looks of Nathan and Hester, she avoided looking in that direction again, for fear the sight of their wistful faces should make her own tears overflow.

"Sit thee down, lass—sit thee down. Bring the creepie-stool to the fireside, and let's have a bit of talk over the lad's plans," said Nathan, at last rousing himself to speak. Bessy came and sat down in front of the fire, and threw her apron over her face, as she rested her head on both hands. Nathan

felt as if it was a chance which of the two women burst out crying first. So he thought he would speak, in hopes of keeping off the infection of tears.

"Didst ever hear of this mad plan afore, Bessy?"

"No, never!" Her voice came muffled and changed from under her apron. Hester felt as if the tone, both of question and answer, implied blame, and this she could not bear.

"We should ha' looked to it when we bound him, for of necessity it would ha' come to this. There's exams, and catechizes, and I dunno what all for him to be put through in London. It's not his fault."

"Which on us said it were?" asked Nathan, rather put out. "Thof, for that matter, a few weeks would carry him over the mire, and make him as good a lawyer as any judge among 'em. Oud Lawson the attorney told me that, in a talk I had wi' him a bit sin. Na, na! it's the lad's own hankering after London that makes him want for to stay there for a year, let alone two."

Nathan shook his head.

"And if it be his own hankering," said Bessy, putting down her apron, her face all flame, and her eyes swollen up, "I dunnot see harm in it. Lads aren't like lasses, to be teed to their own fireside like th' crook yonder. It's fitting for a young man to go abroad and see the world afore he settles down."

Hester's hand sought Bessy's, and the two women sat in sympathetic defiance of any blame that should be thrown on the beloved absent. Nathan only said—

"Nay, wench, dunnot wax up so; whatten's done's done; and worse, it's my doing. I mun needs make my bairn a gentleman; and we mun pay for it."

"Dear uncle! he wunna spend much, I'll answer for it; and I'll scrimp and save i' the house to make it good."

"Wench!" said Nathan solemnly, "it were not paying in cash I were speaking on: it were paying in heart's care, and heaviness of soul. Lunnon is a place where the devil keeps court as well as King George; and my poor chap has more nor once welly fallen into his clutches here. I dunno what he'll do when he gets close within sniff of him."

"Don't let him go, father!" said Hester, for the first time taking this view. Hitherto she had only thought of her own

grief at parting with him. "Father, if you think so, keep him here, safe under our own eye."

"Nay!" said Nathan, "he's past time o' life for that. Why, there's not one on us knows where he is at this present time, and he not gone out of our sight an hour. He's too big to be put back i' th' go-cart, mother, or keep within doors with the chair turned bottom upwards."

"I wish he were a wee bairn lying in my arms again. It were a sore day when I weaned him; and I think life's been gettin' sorer and sorer at every turn he's ta'en towards manhood."

"Coom, lass, that's noan the way to be talking. Be thankful to Marcy that thou'st gotten a man for thy son as stands five foot eleven in's stockings, and ne'er a sick piece about him. We wunnot grudge him his fling, will we, Bess, my wench? He'll be coming back in a year, or, may be, a bit more; and be a' for settling in a quiet town like, wi' a wife that's noan so fur fra' me at this very minute. An' we oud folk, as we get into years, must gi' up farm, and tak a bit on a house near Lawyer Benjamin."

And so the good Nathan, his own heart heavy enough, tried to soothe his womenkind. But of the three, his eyes were longest in closing, his apprehensions the deepest founded.

"I misdoubt me I hanna done well by th' lad. I misdoubt me sore," was the thought that kept him awake till day began to dawn. "Summat's wrong about him, or folk would na look at me wi' such piteous-like een when they speak on him. I can see th' meaning of it, thof I'm too proud to let on. And Lawson, too, he holds his tongue more nor he should do, when I ax him how my lad's getting on, and whatten sort of a lawyer he'll mak. God be marcifal to Hester an' me, if th' lad's gone away! God be marcifal! But may be it's this lying waking a' the night through, that maks me so fearfu'. Why, when I were his age, I daur be bound I should ha' spent money fast enoof, i' I could ha' come by it. But I had to arn it; that maks a great differ'. Well! It were hard to thwart th' child of our old age, and we waitin' so long for to have 'un!"

Next morning, Nathan rode Moggy, the cart-horse, into Highminster to see Mr. Lawson. Anybody who saw him ride out of his own yard would have been struck with the change in him which was visible when he returned; a change,

more than a day's unusual exercise should have made in a man of his years. He scarcely held the reins at all. One jerk of Moggy's head would have plucked them out of his hands. His head was bent forward, his eyes looking on some unseen thing, with long unwinking gaze. But as he drew near home on his return, he made an effort to recover himself.

"No need fretting them," he said; "lads will be lads. But I didna think he had it in him to be so thowtless, young as he is. Well, well! he'll, may be, get more wisdom i' Lunnon. Anyways it's best to cut him off fra such evil lads as Will Hawker, and such-like. It's they as have led my boy astray. He were a good chap till he knowed them—a good chap till he knowed them."

But he put all his cares in the background when he came into the house-place, where both Bessy and his wife met him at the door, and both would fain lend a hand to take off his great-coat.

"Theer, wenches, theer! ye might let a man alone for to get out on's clothes! Why, I might ha' struck thee, lass." And he went on talking, trying to keep them off for a time from the subject that all had at heart. But there was no putting them off for ever; and, by dint of repeated questioning on his wife's part, more was got out than he had ever meant to tell—enough to grieve both his hearers sorely: and yet the brave old man still kept the worst in his own breast.

The next day Benjamin came home for a week or two, before making his great start to London. His father kept him at a distance, and was solemn and quiet in his manner to the young man. Bessy, who had shown anger enough at first, and had uttered many a sharp speech, began to relent, and then to feel hurt and displeased that her uncle should persevere so long in his cold, reserved manner, and Benjamin just going to leave them. Her aunt went, tremblingly busy, about the clothes-presses and drawers, as if afraid of letting herself think either of the past or the future; only once or twice, coming behind her son, she suddenly stopped over his sitting figure, and kissed his cheek, and stroked his hair. Bessy remembered afterwards—long years afterwards—how he had tossed his head away with nervous irritability on one of these occasions, and had muttered—her aunt did not hear it, but Bessy did—

"Can't you leave a man alone?"

Towards Bessy herself he was pretty gracious. No other words express his manner: it was not warm, nor tender, nor cousinly, but there was an assumption of underbred politeness towards her as a young, pretty woman; which politeness was neglected in his authoritative or grumbling manner towards his mother, or his sullen silence before his father. He once or twice ventured on a compliment to Bessy on her personal appearance. She stood still, and looked at him with astonishment.

"How's my eyes changed sin' last thou saw'st them," she asked, "that thou must be telling me about 'em i' that fashion? I'd rayther by a deal see thee helping thy mother when she's dropped her knitting-needle and canna see i' th' dusk for to pick it up."

But Bessy thought of his pretty speech about her eyes long after he had forgotten making it, and would have been puzzled to tell the colour of them. Many a day, after he was gone, did she look earnestly in the little oblong looking-glass, which hung up against the wall of her little sleeping-chamber, but which she used to take down in order to examine the eyes he had praised, murmuring to herself, "Pretty soft grey eyes! Pretty soft grey eyes!" until she would hang up the glass again with a sudden laugh and a rosy blush.

In the days when he had gone away to the vague distance and vaguer place—the city called London—Bessy tried to forget all that had gone against her feeling of the affection and duty that a son owed to his parents; and she had many things to forget of this kind that would keep surging up into her mind. For instance, she wished that he had not objected to the home-spun, home-made shirts which his mother and she had had such pleasure in getting ready for him. He might not know, it was true—and so her love urged—how carefully and evenly the thread had been spun: how, not content with bleaching the yarn in the sunniest meadow, the linen, on its return from the weaver's, had been spread out afresh on the sweet summer grass, and watered carefully night after night when there was no dew to perform the kindly office. He did not know—for no one but Bessy herself did—how many false or large stitches, made large and false by her aunt's failing eyes (who yet liked to do the choicest part of the stitching all

by herself), Bessy had unpicked at night in her own room, and with dainty fingers had restitched ; sewing eagerly in the dead of night. All this he did not know ; or he could never have complained of the coarse texture, the old-fashioned make of these shirts ; and urged on his mother to give him part of her little store of egg and butter money in order to buy newer-fashioned linen in Highminster.

When once that little precious store of his mother's was discovered, it was well for Bessy's peace of mind that she did not know how loosely her aunt counted up the coins, mistaking guineas for shillings, or just the other way, so that the amount was seldom the same in the old black spoutless teapot. Yet this son, this hope, this love, had still a strange power of fascination over the household. The evening before he left, he sat between his parents, a hand in theirs on either side, and Bessy on the old crepie-stool, her head lying on her aunt's knee, and looking up at him from time to time, as if to learn his face off by heart ; till his glances meeting hers, made her drop her eyes, and only sigh.

He stopped up late that night with his father, long after the women had gone to bed. But not to sleep ; for I will answer for it the grey-haired mother never slept a wink till the late dawn of the autumn day ; and Bessy heard her uncle come upstairs with heavy, deliberate footsteps, and go to the old stocking which served him for bank, and count out the golden guineas ; once he stopped, but again he went on afresh, as if resolved to crown his gift with liberality. Another long pause—in which she could but indistinctly hear continued words, it might have been advice, it might be a prayer, for it was in her uncle's voice—and then father and son came up to bed. Bessy's room was but parted from her cousin's by a thin wooden partition ; and the last sound she distinctly heard, before her eyes, tired out with crying, closed themselves in sleep, was the guineas clinking down upon each other at regular intervals, as if Benjamin were playing at pitch and toss with his father's present.

After he was gone, Bessy wished he had asked her to walk part of the way with him into Highminster. She was all ready, her things laid out on the bed ; but she could not accompany him without invitation.

The little household tried to close over the gap as best they

might. They seemed to set themselves to their daily work with unusual vigour ; but somehow when evening came there had been little done. Heavy hearts never make light work, and there was no telling how much care and anxiety each had had to bear in secret in the field, at the wheel, or in the dairy. Formerly he was looked for every Saturday—looked for, though he might not come ; or if he came, there were things to be spoken about that made his visit anything but a pleasure : still he might come, and all things might go right ; and then what sunshine, what gladness to those humble people ! But now he was away, and dreary winter was come on ; old folks' sight fails, and the evenings were long, and sad, in spite of all Bessy could do or say. And he did not write so often as he might—so every one thought ; though every one would have been ready to defend him from either of the others who had expressed such a thought aloud. " Surely," said Bessy to herself, when the first primroses peeped out in a sheltered and sunny hedge-bank, and she gathered them as she passed home from afternoon church—" surely, there never will be such a dreary, miserable winter again as this has been." There had been a great change in Nathan and Hester Huntroyd during this last year. The spring before, when Benjamin was yet the subject of more hopes than fears, his father and mother looked what I may call an elderly middle-aged couple : people who had a good deal of hearty work in them yet. Now—it was not his absence alone that caused the change—they looked frail and old, as if each day's natural trouble was a burden more than they could bear. For Nathan had heard sad reports about his only child, and had told them solemnly to his wife, as things too bad to be believed, and yet, " God help us if he is indeed such a lad as this !" Their eyes were become too dry and hollow for many tears ; they sat together, hand in hand ; and shivered, and sighed, and did not speak many words, or dare to look at each other : and then Hester had said—

" We mauna tell th' lass. Young folks' hearts break wi' a little, and she'd be apt to fancy it were true." Here the old woman's voice broke into a kind of piping cry, but she struggled, and her next words were all right. " We mauna tell her ; he's bound to be fond on her, and, may be, if she thinks well on him, and loves him, it will bring him straight !"

" God grant it !" said Nathan.

"God shall grant it!" said Hester, passionately moaning out her words; and then repeating them, alas! with a vain repetition.

"It's a bad place for lying, is Highminster," said she at length, as if impatient of the silence. "I never knowed such a place for getting up stories. But Bessy knows nought on, and nother you nor me belie'es 'em, that's one blessing."

But if they did not in their hearts believe them, how came they to look so sad, and worn, beyond what mere age could make them?

Then came round another year, another winter, yet more miserable than the last. This year, with the primroses, came Benjamin; a bad, hard, flippant young man, with yet enough of specious manners and handsome countenance to make his appearance striking at first to those to whom the aspect of a London fast young man of the lowest order is strange and new. Just at first, as he sauntered in with a swagger and an air of indifference, which was partly assumed, partly real, his old parents felt a simple kind of awe of him, as if he were not their son, but a real gentleman; but they had too much fine instinct in their homely natures not to know, after a very few minutes had passed, that this was not a true prince.

"Whatten ever does he mean," said Hester to her niece, as soon as they were alone, "by a' them maks and wearlocks? And he minces his words as if his tongue were clipped short, or split like a magpie's. Hech! London is as bad as a hot day i' August for spoiling good flesh; for he were a good-looking lad when he went up; and now, look at him, with his skin gone into lines and flourishes, just like the first page on a copybook."

"I think he looks a good deal better, aunt, for them new-fashioned whiskers!" said Bessy, blushing still at the remembrance of the kiss he had given her on first seeing her—a pledge, she thought, poor girl, that, in spite of his long silence in letter-writing, he still looked upon her as his troth-pledge wife. There were things about him which none of them liked, although they never spoke of them; yet there was also something to gratify them in the way in which he remained quiet at Nab-End, instead of seeking variety, as he had formerly done, by constantly stealing off to the neighbouring town. His father had paid all the debts that he knew of, soon after

Benjamin had gone up to London ; so there were no duns that his parents knew to alarm him, and keep him at home. And he went out in the morning with the old man, his father, and lounged by his side, as Nathan went round his fields, with busy yet infirm gait, having heart, as he would have expressed it, in all that was going on, because at length his son seemed to take an interest in the farming affairs, and stood patiently by his side while he compared his own small galloways with the great shorthorns looming over his neighbour's hedge.

"It's a slovenly way, thou seest, that of selling th' milk ; folk don't care whether it's good or not, so that they get their pint-measure full of stuff that's watered afore its leaves th' beast; instead o' honest cheating by the help o' th' pump. But look at Bessy's butter, what skill it shows ! part her own manner o' making, and part good choice o' cattle. It's a pleasure to see her basket, a' packed ready for to go to market ; and it's noan o' a pleasure for to see the buckets fu' of their blue starch-water as yon beasts give. I'm thinking they crossed th' breed wi' a pump not long sin'. Hech ! but our Bessy's a clever canny wench ! I sometimes think thou'lt be for gie'ing up th' law, and taking to th' oud trade, when thou wedst wi' her !" This was intended to be a skilful way of ascertaining whether there was any ground for the old farmer's wish and prayer that Benjamin might give up the law and return to the primitive occupation of his father. Nathan dared to hope it now, since his son had never made much by his profession, owing, as he had said, to his want of a connection ; and the farm, and the stock, and the clean wife, too, were ready to his hand ; and Nathan could safely rely on himself never in his most unguarded moments to reproach his son with the hardly-earned hundreds that had been spent on his education. So the old man listened with painful interest to the answer which his son was evidently struggling to make ; coughing a little, and blowing his nose before he spoke.

"Well ! you see, father, law is a precarious livelihood ; a man, as I may express myself, has no chance in the profession unless he is known—known to the judges, and tip-top barristers, and that sort of thing. Now, you see, my mother and you have no acquaintance that you may call exactly in

that line. But luckily I have met with a man, a friend, as I may say, who is really a first-rate fellow, knowing everybody, from the Lord Chancellor downwards; and he has offered me a share in his business—a partnership, in short"— He hesitated a little.

"I'm sure that's uncommon kind of the gentleman," said Nathan. "I should like for to thank him mysen; for it's not many as would pick up a young chap out o' th' dirt as it were, and say 'Here's hauf my good fortune for you, sir, and your very good health.' Most on 'em, when they're gettin' a bit o' luck, run off wi' it to keep it a' to themselves, and gobble it down in a corner. What may be his name, for I should like to know it?"

"You don't quite apprehend me, father. A great deal of what you've said is true to the letter. People don't like to share their good luck, as you say."

"The more credit to them as does," broke in Nathan.

"Ay, but, you see, even such a fine fellow as my friend Cavendish does not like to give away half his good practice for nothing. He expects an equivalent."

"An equivalent," said Nathan: his voice had dropped down an octave. "And what may that be? There's always some meaning in grand words, I take it, though I am not book-larned enough to find it out."

"Why, in this case, the equivalent he demands for taking me into partnership, and afterwards relinquishing the whole business to me, is three hundred pounds down."

Benjamin looked sideways from under his eyes to see how his father took the proposition. His father struck his stick deep down in the ground, and leaning one hand upon it, faced round at him.

"Then thy fine friend may go and be hanged. Three hunder pound! I'll be darned an' danged too, if I know where to get 'em, if I'd be making a fool o' thee an' mysen too."

He was out of breath by this time. His son took his father's first words in dogged silence; it was but the burst of surprise he had led himself to expect, and did not daunt him for long.

"I should think, sir"—

"'Sir'—whatten for dost thou 'sir' me? Is them your

manners? I'm plain Nathan Huntroyd, who never took on to be a gentleman; but I have paid my way up to this time, which I shannot do much longer, if I'm to have a son coming an' asking me for three hundred pound, just meet same as if I were a cow, and had nothing to do but let down my milk to the first person as strokes me."

"Well, father," said Benjamin, with an affectation of frankness, "then there's nothing for me, but to do as I have often planned before—go and emigrate."

"And *what?*" said his father, looking sharply and steadily at him.

"Emigrate. Go to America, or India, or some colony where there would be an opening for a young man of spirit."

Benjamin had reserved this proposition for his trump card, expecting by means of it to carry all before him. But, to his surprise, his father plucked his stick out of the hole he had made when he so vehemently thrust it into the ground, and walked on four or five steps in advance; there he stood still again, and there was a dead silence for a few minutes.

"It 'ud, may be, be the best thing thou couldst do," the father began. Benjamin set his teeth hard to keep in curses. It was well for poor Nathan he did not look round then, and see the look his son gave him. "But it would come hard like upon us, upon Hester and me, for, whether thou'rt a good 'un or not, thou'rt our flesh and blood, our only bairn, and if thou'rt not all as a man could wish, it's, may be, been the fault on our pride i' the—— It 'ud kill the missus if he went off to Amerikay, and Bess, too, the lass as thinks so much on him!" The speech, originally addressed to his son, had wandered off into a monologue—as keenly listened to by Benjamin, however, as if it had all been spoken to him. After a pause of consideration, his father turned round: "Yon man—I wunnot call him a friend o' yourn, to think of asking you for such a mint o' money—is not th' only one, I'll be bound, as could give ye a start i' the law? Other folks 'ud, may be, do it for less?"

"Not one of 'em; to give me equal advantages," said Benjamin, thinking he perceived signs of relenting.

"Well, then, thou may'st tell him that it's nother he nor thee

as 'll see th' sight o' three hundred pound o' my money. I'll not deny as I've a bit laid up again a rainy day; it's not so much as thatten though, and a part on it is for Bessy, as has been like a daughter to us."

"But Bessy is to be your real daughter some day, when I've a home to take her to," said Benjamin; for he played very fast and loose, even in his own mind, with his engagement with Bessy. Present with her, when she was looking her brightest and best, he behaved to her as if they were engaged lovers; absent from her, he looked upon her rather as a good wedge, to be driven into his parents' favour on his behalf. Now, however, he was not exactly untrue in speaking as if he meant to make her his wife; for the thought was in his mind, though he made use of it to work upon his father.

"It will be a dree day for us, then," said the old man. "But God 'll have us in his keeping, and 'll, may-happen, be taking more care on us i' heaven by that time than Bess, good lass as she is, has had on us at Nab-End. Her heart is set on thee, too. But, lad, I hanna gotten the three hunder; I keeps my cash i' th' stocking, thou know'st, till it reaches fifty pound, and then I takes it to Ripon Bank. Now the last scratch they'n gi'en me made it just two hunder, and I hanna but on to fifteen pound yet i' the stockin', and I meant one hunder an' the red cow's calf to be for Bess, she's ta'en such pleasure like i' rearing it."

Benjamin gave a sharp glance at his father to see if he was telling the truth; and that a suspicion of the old man, his father, had entered into the son's head, tells enough of his own character.

"I canna do it, I canna do it, for sure, although I shall like to think as I had helped on the wedding. There's the black heifer to be sold yet, and she'll fetch a matter of ten pound; but a deal on't will be needed for seed-corn, for the arable did but bad last year, and I thought I would try; I'll tell thee what, lad! I'll make it as though Bess lent thee her hunder, only thou must give her a writ of hand for it, and thou shalt have a' the money i' Ripon Bank, and see if the lawyer wunnot let thee have a share of what he offered thee at three hunder for two. I dunnot mean for to wrong him, but thou must get a fair share for the money. At times I think thou'rt done by folk; now, I wadna have you cheat a bairn of a

brass farthing; same time I wadna have thee so soft as to be cheated."

To explain this, it should be told that some of the bills which Benjamin had received money from his father to pay, had been altered so as to cover other and less creditable expenses which the young man had incurred; and the simple old farmer, who had still much faith left in him for his boy, was acute enough to perceive that he had paid above the usual price for the articles he had purchased.

After some hesitation, Benjamin agreed to receive the two hundred, and promised to employ it to the best advantage in setting himself up in business. He had, nevertheless, a strange hankering after the additional fifteen pounds that was left to accumulate in the stocking. It was his, he thought, as heir to his father; and he soon lost some of his usual complaisance for Bessy that evening, as he dwelt on the idea that there was money being laid by for her, and grudged it to her even in imagination. He thought more of this fifteen pounds that he was not to have than of all the hardly-earned and humbly-saved two hundred that he was to come into possession of. Meanwhile, Nathan was in unusual spirits that evening. He was so generous and affectionate at heart, that he had an unconscious satisfaction in having helped two people on the road to happiness by the sacrifice of the greater part of his property. The very fact of having trusted his son so largely, seemed to make Benjamin more worthy of trust in his father's estimation. The sole idea he tried to banish was, that, if all came to pass as he hoped, both Benjamin and Bessy would be settled far away from Nab-End; but then he had a child-like reliance that "God would take care of him and his missus, somehow or anodder. It wur o' nɔ use looking too far ahead."

Bessy had to hear many unintelligible jokes from her uncle that night; for he made no doubt that Benjamin had told her all that had passed, whereas the truth was, his son had said never a word to his cousin on the subject.

When the old couple were in bed, Nathan told his wife of the promise he had made to his son, and the plan in life which the advance of the two hundred was to promote. Poor Hester was a little startled at the sudden change in the destination of the sum, which she had long thought of with secret pride as

"money i' th' bank." But she was willing enough to part with it, if necessary, for Benjamin. Only, how such a sum could be necessary, was the puzzle. But even this perplexity was jostled out of her mind by the overwhelming idea, not only of "our Ben" settling in London, but of Bessy going there too as his wife. This great trouble swallowed up all care about money, and Hester shivered and sighed all the night through with distress. In the morning, as Bessy was kneading the bread, her aunt, who had been sitting by the fire in an unusual manner, for one of her active habits, said—

"I reckon we maun go to th' shop for our bread, an' that's a thing I never thought to come to so long as I lived."

Bessy looked up from her kneading, surprised.

"I'm sure, I'm noan going to eat their nasty stuff. What for do ye want to get baker's bread, aunt? This dough will rise as high as a kite in a south wind."

"I'm not up to kneading as I could do once; it welly breaks my back; and when thou'rt off in London, I reckon we maun buy our bread, first time in my life."

"I'm not a-going to London," said Bessy, kneading away with fresh resolution, and growing very red, either with the idea or the exertion.

"But our Ben is going partner wi' a great London lawyer, and thou know'st he'll not tarry long but what he'll fetch thee."

"Now, aunt," said Bessy, stripping her arms of the dough, but still not looking up, "if that's all, don't fret yourself. Ben will have twenty minds in his head afore he settles, eyther in business or in wedlock. I sometimes wonder," she said, with increasing vehemence, "why I go on thinking on him; for I dunnot think he thinks on me, when I'm out o' sight. I've a month's mind to try and forget him this time when he leaves us—that I have!"

"For shame, wench! and he to be planning and purposing all for thy sake. It wur only yesterday as he wur talking to thy uncle, and napping it out so clever; only thou sceest, wench, it'll be dree work for us when both thee and him is gone."

The old woman began to cry the kind of tearless cry of the aged. Bessy hastened to comfort her; and the two talked, and grieved, and hoped, and planned for the days

that now were to be, till they ended, the one in being consoled, the other in being secretly happy.

Nathan and his son came back from Highminster that evening, with their business transacted in the roundabout way which was most satisfactory to the old man. If he had thought it necessary to take half as much pains in ascertaining the truth of the plausible details by which his son bore out the story of the offered partnership as he did in trying to get his money conveyed to London in the most secure manner, it would have been well for him. But he knew nothing of all this, and acted in the way which satisfied his anxiety best. He came home tired, but content; not in such high spirits as on the night before, but as easy in his mind as he could be on the eve of his son's departure. Bessy, pleasantly agitated by her aunt's tale of the morning of her cousin's true love for her—what ardently we wish we long believe—and the plan which was to end in their marriage—end to her, the woman, at least—Bessy looked almost pretty in her bright, blushing comeliness, and more than once, as she moved about from kitchen to dairy, Benjamin pulled her towards him, and gave her a kiss. To all such proceedings the old couple were wilfully blind; and, as night drew on, every one became sadder and quieter, thinking of the parting that was to be on the morrow. As the hours slipped away, Bessy too became subdued; and, by-and-by, her simple cunning was exerted to get Benjamin to sit down next his mother, whose very heart was yearning after him, as Bessy saw. When once her child was placed by her side and she had got possession of his hand, the old woman kept stroking it, and murmuring long unused words of endearment, such as she had spoken to him while he was yet a little child. But all this was wearisome to him. As long as he might play with, and plague, and caress Bessy, he had not been sleepy; but now he yawned loudly. Bessy could have boxed his ears for not curbing this gaping; at any rate, he need not have done it so openly—so almost ostentatiously. His mother was more pitiful.

"Thou'rt tired, my lad!" said she, putting her hand fondly on his shoulder; but it fell off, as he stood up suddenly, and said—

"Yes, deuced tired! I'm off to bed." And with a rough, careless kiss all round, even to Bessy, as if he was "deuced tired" of playing the lover, he was gone; leaving the three to gather up their thoughts slowly, and follow him upstairs.

He seemed almost impatient at them for rising betimes to see him off the next morning, and made no more of a good-bye than some such speech as this: "Well, good folk, when next I see you, I hope you'll have merrier faces than you have to-day. Why, you might be going to a funeral; it's enough to scare a man from the place; you look quite ugly to what you did last night, Bess."

He was gone; and they turned into the house, and settled to the long day's work without many words about their loss. They had no time for unnecessary talking, indeed, for much had been left undone, during his short visit, that ought to have been done; and they had now to work double tides. Hard work was their comfort for many a long day.

For some time Benjamin's letters, if not frequent, were full of exultant accounts of his well-doing. It is true that the details of his prosperity were somewhat vague; but the fact was broadly and unmistakably stated. Then came longer pauses; shorter letters, altered in tone. About a year after he had left them, Nathan received a letter which bewildered and irritated him exceedingly. Something had gone wrong—what, Benjamin did not say—but the letter ended with a request that was almost a demand, for the remainder of his father's savings, whether in the stocking or the bank. Now, the year had not been prosperous with Nathan; there had been an epidemic among cattle, and he had suffered along with his neighbours; and, moreover, the price of cows, when he had bought some to repair his wasted stock, was higher than he had ever remembered it before. The fifteen pounds in the stocking, which Benjamin left, had diminished to little more than three; and to have that required of him in so peremptory a manner! Before Nathan imparted the contents of this letter to any one (Bessy and her aunt had gone to market on a neighbour's cart that day), he got pen and ink and paper, and wrote back an ill-spelt, but very explicit and stern negative. Benjamin had had his portion; and if he could not make it do, so

much the worse for him; his father had no more to give him. That was the substance of the letter.

The letter was written, directed, and sealed, and given to the country postman, returning to Highminster after his day's distribution and collection of letters, before Hester and Bessy came back from market. It had been a pleasant day of neighbourly meeting and sociable gossip: prices had been high, and they were in good spirits, only agreeably tired, and full of small pieces of news. It was some time before they found out how flatly all their talk fell on the ears of the stay-at-home listener. But when they saw that his depression was caused by something beyond their powers of accounting for by any little every-day cause, they urged him to tell them what was the matter. His anger had not gone off. It had rather increased by dwelling upon it, and he spoke it out in good, resolute terms; and, long ere he had ended, the two women were as sad, if not as angry, as himself. Indeed, it was many days before either feeling wore away in the minds of those who entertained them. Bessy was the soonest comforted, because she found a vent for her sorrow in action; action that was half as a kind of compensation for many a sharp word that she had spoken when her cousin had done anything to displease her on his last visit, and half because she believed that he never could have written such a letter to his father unless his want of money had been very pressing and real; though how he could ever have wanted money so soon, after such a heap of it had been given to him, was more than she could justly say. Bessy got out all her savings of little presents of sixpences and shillings, ever since she had been a child,—of all the money she had gained for the eggs of two hens, called her own; she put the whole together, and it was above two pounds—two pounds five and sevenpence, to speak accurately—and leaving out the penny as a nest-egg for her future savings, she made up the rest in a little parcel, and sent it, with a note, to Benjamin's address in London:—

“ From a well-wisher.

“ Dr. BENJAMIN,—Unkle has lost 2 cows and a vast of monney. He is a good deal Angored, but more Troubled. So no more at present. Hoping this will finding you well

As it leaves us, Tho' lost to Site, To Memory Dear. Re-
payment not kneeded.—Your effectonet cousin,

“ELIZABETH ROSE.”

When this packet was once fairly sent off, Bessy began to sing again over her work. She never expected the mere form of acknowledgment; indeed, she had such faith in the carrier (who took parcels to York, whence they were forwarded to London by coach), that she felt sure he would go on purpose to London to deliver anything intrusted to him, if he had not full confidence in the person, persons, coach and horses, to whom he committed it. Therefore she was not anxious that she did not hear of its arrival. “Giving a thing to a man as one knows,” said she to herself, “is a vast different to poking a thing through a hole into a box, th' inside of which one has never clapped eyes on; and yet letters get safe some ways or another.” (The belief in the infallibility of the post was destined to a shock before long.) But she had a secret yearning for Benjamin's thanks, and some of the old words of love that she had been without so long. Nay, she even thought—when, day after day, week after week, passed by without a line—that he might be winding up his affairs in that weary, wasteful London, and coming back to Nab-End to thank her in person.

One day—her aunt was upstairs, inspecting the summer's make of cheeses, her uncle out in the fields—the postman brought a letter into the kitchen to Bessy. A country postman, even now, is not much pressed for time, and in those days there were but few letters to distribute, and they were only sent out from Highminster once a week into the district in which Nab-End was situated; and on those occasions, the letter-carrier usually paid morning calls on the various people for whom he had letters. So, half standing by the dresser, half sitting on it, he began to rummage out his bag. “It's a queer-like thing I've got for Nathan this time. I am afraid it will bear ill news in it, for there's ‘Dead Letter Office’ stamped on the top of it.”

“Lord save us,” said Bessy, and sat down on the nearest chair, as white as a sheet. In an instant, however, she was up, and snatching the ominous letter out of the man's hands, she pushed him before her out of the house, and said, “Be

off wi' thee, afore aunt comes down;" and ran past him as hard as she could, till she reached the field where she expected to find her uncle.

"Uncle," said she, breathless, "what is it? Oh, uncle, speak! Is he dead?"

Nathan's hands trembled, and his eyes dazzled. "Take it," he said, "and tell me what it is."

"It's a letter—it's from you to Benjamin, it is—and there's words written on it, 'Not known at the address given;' so they've sent it back to the writer—that's you, uncle. Oh, it gave me such a start, with them nasty words written outside!"

Nathan had taken the letter back into his own hands, and was turning it over, while he strove to understand what the quick-witted Bessy had picked up at a glance. But he arrived at a different conclusion.

"He's dead!" said he. "The lad is dead, and he never knowed how as I were sorry I wrote to 'un so sharp. My lad! my lad!" Nathan sat down on the ground where he stood, and covered his face with his old, withered hands. The letter returned to him was one which he had written, with infinite pains and at various times, to tell his child, in kinder words and at greater length than he had done before, the reasons why he could not send him the money demanded. And now Benjamin was dead; nay, the old man immediately jumped to the conclusion that his child had been starved to death, without money, in a wild, wide, strange place. All he could say at first was—

"My heart, Bess—my heart is broken!" And he put his hand to his side, still keeping his shut eyes covered with the other, as though he never wished to see the light of day again. Bessy was down by his side in an instant, holding him in her arms, chafing and kissing him.

"It's noan so bad, uncle; he's not dead; the letter does not say that, dunnot think it. He's flitted from that lodging, and the lazy tykes dunna know where to find him; and so they just send y' back th' letter, instead of trying fra' house to house, as Mark Benson would. I've always heerd tell on south-country folk for laziness. He's noan dead, uncle; he's just flitted, and he'll let us know afore long where he's gotten to. May be it's a cheaper place, for that lawyer has cheated

him, ye reck'let, and he'll be trying to live for as little as he can, that's all, uncle. Dunnot take on so, for it doesna say he's dead."

By this time Bessy was crying with agitation, although she firmly believed in her own view of the case, and had felt the opening of the ill-favoured letter as a great relief. Presently she began to urge, both with word and action, upon her uncle, that he should sit no longer on the damp grass. She pulled him up, for he was very stiff, and, as he said, "all shaken to dithers." She made him walk about, repeating over and over again her solution of the case, always in the same words, beginning again and again, "He's noan dead; it's just been a flitting," and so on. Nathan shook his head, and tried to be convinced; but it was a steady belief in his own heart for all that. He looked so deathly ill on his return home with Bessy (for she would not let him go on with his day's work), that his wife made sure he had taken cold, and he, weary and indifferent to life, was glad to subside into bed and the rest from exertion which his real bodily illness gave him. Neither Bessy nor he spoke of the letter again, even to each other, for many days, and she found means to stop Mark Benson's tongue, and satisfy his kindly curiosity, by giving him the rosy side of her own view of the case.

Nathan got up again, an older man in looks and constitution by ten years for that week of bed. His wife gave him many a scolding on his imprudence for sitting down in the wet field, if ever so tired. But now she, too, was beginning to be uneasy at Benjamin's long-continued silence. She could not write herself, but she urged her husband many a time to send a letter to ask for news of her lad. He said nothing in reply for some time: at length he told her he would write next Sunday afternoon. Sunday was his general day for writing, and this Sunday he meant to go to church for the first time since his illness. On Saturday he was very persistent, against his wife's wishes (backed by Bessy as hard as she could), in resolving to go into Highminster to market. The change would do him good, he said. But he came home tired, and a little mysterious in his ways. When he went to the shippon the last thing at night, he asked Bessy to go with him, and hold the lantern, while he looked at an ailing cow; and when they were fairly out of the ear-shot of the house, he pulled a little shop-parcel from his pocket and said—

"Thou'lt put that on ma Sunday hat, wilt'ou, lass? It'll be a bit on a comfort to me; for I know my lad's dead and gone, though I dunna speak on it, for fear o' grieving th' old woman and ye."

"I'll put it on, uncle, if—— But he's noan dead." (Bessy was sobbing.)

"I know—I know, lass. I dunnot wish other folk to hold my opinion; but I'd like to wear a bit o' crape out o' respect to my boy. It 'ud have done me good for to have ordered a black coat, but she'd see if I had na' on my wedding-coat, Sundays, for a' she's losing her eyesight, poor old wench! But she'll ne'er take notice o' a bit o' crape. Thou'lt put it on all canny and tidy."

So Nathan went to church with a strip of crape, as narrow as Bessy durst venture to make it, round his hat. Such is the contradictoriness of human nature, that, though he was most anxious his wife should not hear of his conviction that their son was dead, he was half hurt that none of his neighbours noticed his sign of mourning so far as to ask him for whom he wore it.

But after a while, when they never heard a word from or about Benjamin, the household wonder as to what had become of him grew so painful and strong, that Nathan no longer kept his idea to himself. Poor Hester, however, rejected it with her whole will, heart, and soul. She could not and would not believe—nothing should make her believe—that her only child Benjamin had died without some sign of love or farewell to her. No arguments could shake her in this. She believed that, if all natural means of communication between her and him had been cut off at the last supreme moment—if death had come upon him in an instant, sudden and unexpected—her intense love would have been supernaturally made conscious of the blank. Nathan at times tried to feel glad that she could still hope to see the lad again; but at other moments he wanted her sympathy in his grief, his self-reproach, his weary wonder as to how and what they had done wrong in the treatment of their son, that he had been such a care and sorrow to his parents. Bessy was convinced, first by her aunt, and then by her uncle—honestly convinced—on both sides of the argument; and so, for the time, able to sympathise with each. But she lost her youth in a very few months; she looked set

and middle-aged long before she ought to have done; and rarely smiled and never sang again.

All sorts of new arrangements were required by the blow which told so miserably upon the energies of all the household at Nab-End. Nathan could no longer go about and direct his two men, taking a good turn of work himself at busy times. Hester lost her interest in the dairy; for which, indeed, her increasing loss of sight unfitted her. Bessy would either do field-work, or attend to the cows and the shippin, or churn, or make cheese; she did all well, no longer merrily, but with something of stern cleverness. But she was not sorry when her uncle, one evening, told her aunt and her that a neighbouring farmer, Job Kirkby, had made him an offer to take so much of his land off his hands as would leave him only pasture enough for two cows, and no arable to attend to; while Farmer Kirkby did not wish to interfere with anything in the house, only would be glad to use some of the out-building for his fattening cattle.

"We can do wi' Hawky and Daisy; it'll leave us eight or ten pound o' butter to take to market i' summer time, and keep us fra' thinking too much, which is what I'm dreading on as I get into years."

"Ay," said his wife. "Thou'll not have to go so far afield, if it's only the Aster-Toft as is on thy hands. And Bess will have to gie up her pride i' cheese, and tak' to making cream-butter. I'd allays a fancy for trying at cream-butter, but th' whey had to be used; else, where I come fra', they'd never ha' looked near whey-butter."

When Hester was left alone with Bessy, she said, in allusion to this change of plan—

"I'm thankful to the Lord that it is as it is: for I were allays afeared Nathan would have to gie up the house and farm altogether, and then the lad would na' know where to find us when he came back fra' Merikay. He's gone there for to make his fortune, I'll be bound. Keep up thy heart, lass, he'll be home some day; and have sown his wild oats. Eh! but thatten's a pretty story i' the Gospel about the Prodigal, who'd to eat the pigs' vittles at one time, but ended i' clover in his father's house. And I'm sure our Nathan 'll be ready to forgive him, and love him, and make much of him, may be a deal more nor me,

who never gave in to 's death. It'll be liken to a resurrection to our Nathan."

Farmer Kirkby, then, took by far the greater part of the land belonging to Nab-End Farm; and the work about the rest, and about the two remaining cows, was easily done by three pairs of willing hands, with a little occasional assistance. The Kirkby family were pleasant enough to have to deal with. There was a son, a stiff, grave bachelor, who was very particular and methodical about his work, and rarely spoke to any one. But Nathan took it into his head that John Kirkby was looking after Bessy, and was a good deal troubled in his mind in consequence; for it was the first time he had to face the effects of his belief in his son's death; and he discovered, to his own surprise, that he had not that implicit faith which would make it easy for him to look upon Bessy as the wife of another man, than the one to whom she had been betrothed in her youth. As, however, John Kirkby seemed in no hurry to make his intentions (if indeed he had any) clear to Bessy, it was only now and then that his jealousy on behalf of his lost son seized upon Nathan.

But people, old, and in deep hopeless sorrow, grow irritable at times, however they may repent and struggle against their irritability. There were days when Bessy had to bear a good deal from her uncle; but she loved him so dearly and respected him so much, that, high as her temper was to all other people, she never returned him a rough or impatient word. And she had a reward in the conviction of his deep, true affection for her, and her aunt's entire and most sweet dependence upon her.

One day, however—it was near the end of November—Bessy had had a good deal to bear, that seemed more than usually unreasonable, on behalf of her uncle. The truth was, that one of Kirkby's cows was ill, and John Kirkby was a good deal about in the farmyard; Bessy was interested about the animal, and had helped in preparing a mash over their own fire, that had to be given warm to the sick creature. If John had been out of the way, there would have been no one more anxious about the affair than Nathan; both because he was naturally kind-hearted and neighbourly, and also because he was rather proud of

his reputation for knowledge in the diseases of cattle. But because John was about, and Bessy helping a little in what had to be done, Nathan would do nothing, and chose to assume that "nothing to think on ailed th' beast, but lads and lasses were allays fain to be feared on something." Now John was upwards of forty, and Bessy nearly eight-and-twenty, so the terms lads and lasses did not exactly apply to their case.

When Bessy brought the milk in from their own cows, towards half-past five o'clock, Nathan bade her make the doors, and not be running out i' the dark and cold about other folks' business; and, though Bessy was a little surprised and a good deal annoyed at his tone, she sat down to her supper without making a remonstrance. It had long been Nathan's custom to look out the last thing at night, to see "what mak' o' weather it wur;" and when, towards half-past eight, he got his stick and went out—two or three steps from the door, which opened into the house-place where they were sitting—Hester put her hand on her niece's shoulder and said—

"He's gotten a touch o' the rheumatics, as twinges him and makes him speak so sharp. I didna like to ask thee afore him, but how's yon poor beast?"

"Very ailing, belike. John Kirkby wur off for th' cow-doctor when I cam in. I reckon they'll have to stop up wi't a' night."

Since their sorrows her uncle had taken to reading a chapter in the Bible aloud, the last thing at night. He could not read fluently, and often hesitated long over a word, which he miscalled at length; but the very fact of opening the book seemed to soothe those old bereaved parents; for it made them feel quiet and safe in the presence of God, and took them out of the cares and troubles of this world into that futurity which, however dim and vague, was to their faithful hearts as a sure and certain rest. This little quiet time—Nathan sitting with his horn spectacles, the tallow candle between him and the Bible, and throwing a strong light on his reverent, earnest face; Hester sitting on the other side of the fire, her head bowed in attentive listening, now and then shaking it, and moaning a little, but when a promise came, or any good tidings

of great joy, saying "Amen" with fervour; Bessy by her aunt, perhaps her mind a little wandering to some household cares, or it might be on thoughts of those who were absent—this little quiet pause, I say, was grateful and soothing to this household, as a lullaby to a tired child. But this night, Bessy, sitting opposite to the long, low window, only shaded by a few geraniums that grew in the sill, and to the door alongside that window through which her uncle had passed not a quarter of an hour before, saw the wooden latch of the door gently and almost noiselessly lifted up, as if some one were trying it from the outside.

She was startled; and watched again, intently, but it was perfectly still now. She thought it must have been that it had not fallen into its proper place, when her uncle had come in and locked the door. It was just enough to make her uncomfortable, no more; and she almost persuaded herself it must have been fancy. Before going upstairs, however, she went to the window to look out into the darkness; but all was still. Nothing to be seen; nothing to be heard. So the three went quietly upstairs to bed.

The house was little better than a cottage. The front door opened on a house-place, over which was the old couple's bedroom. To the left, as you entered this pleasant house-place, and at close right angles with the entrance, was a door that led into the small parlour, which was Hester's and Bessy's pride, although not half as comfortable as the house-place, and never on any occasion used as a sitting-room. There were shells and bunches of honesty in the fireplace; the best chest of drawers, and a company set of gaudy-coloured china, and a bright common carpet on the floor; but all failed to give it the aspect of the homely comfort and delicate cleanliness of the house-place. Over this parlour was the bedroom which Benjamin had slept in when a boy, when at home. It was kept still in a kind of readiness for him. The bed was yet there, in which none had slept since he had last done, eight or nine years ago; and every now and then the warming-pan was taken quietly and silently up by his old mother, and the bed thoroughly aired. But this she did in her husband's absence, and without saying a word to any one;

nor did Bessy offer to help her, though her eyes often filled with tears as she saw her aunt still going through the hopeless service. But the room had become a receptacle for all unused things; and there was always a corner of it appropriated to the winter's store of apples. To the left of the house-place, as you stood facing the fire, on the side opposite to the window and outer door, were two other doors; the one on the right led into a kind of back kitchen, and had a lean-to roof, and a door opening on to the farm-yard and back premises; the left-hand door gave on the stairs, underneath which was a closet, in which various household treasures were kept, and beyond that the dairy, over which Bessy slept; her little chamber window opening just above the sloping roof of the back-kitchen. There were neither blinds nor shutters to any of the windows either upstairs or down; the house was built of stone, and there was heavy framework of the same material round the little casement windows, and the long, low window of the house-place was divided by what, in grander dwellings, would be called mullions.

By nine o'clock this night of which I am speaking, all had gone upstairs to bed; it was even later than usual, for the burning of candles was regarded so much in the light of an extravagance, that the household kept early hours even for country-folk. But, somehow, this evening, Bessy could not sleep, although in general she was in deep slumber five minutes after her head touched the pillow. Her thoughts ran on the chances for John Kirkby's cow, and a little fear lest the disorder might be epidemic, and spread to their own cattle. Across all these homely cares came a vivid, uncomfortable recollection of the way in which the door-latch went up and down, without any sufficient agency to account for it. She felt more sure now, than she had done downstairs, that it was a real movement, and no effect of her imagination. She wished that it had not happened just when her uncle was reading, that she might at once have gone quick to the door, and convinced herself of the cause. As it was, her thoughts ran uneasily on the supernatural; and thence to Benjamin, her dear cousin and playfellow, her early lover. She had long given him up as lost for ever to her, if not actually dead; but this very giving him up for ever involved

a free, full forgiveness of all his wrongs to her. She thought tenderly of him, as of one who might have been led astray in his later years, but who existed rather in her recollection as the innocent child, the spirited lad, the handsome, dashing young man. If John Kirkby's quiet attentions had ever betrayed his wishes to Bessy—if indeed he ever had any wishes on the subject—her first feeling would have been to compare his weather-beaten, middle-aged face and figure with the face and figure she remembered well, but never more expected to see in this life. So thinking, she became very restless, and weary of bed, and, after long tossing and turning, ending in a belief that she should never get to sleep at all that night, she went off soundly and suddenly.

As suddenly was she wide awake, sitting up in bed, listening to some noise that must have awakened her, but which was not repeated for some time. Surely it was in her uncle's room—her uncle was up; but, for a minute or two, there was no further sound. Then she heard him open his door, and go downstairs, with hurried, stumbling steps. She now thought that her aunt must be ill, and hastily sprang out of bed, and was putting on her petticoat with hurried, trembling hands, and had just opened her chamber door, when she heard the front door undone, and a scuffle, as of the feet of several people, and many rude, passionate words, spoken hoarsely below the breath. Quick as thought she understood it all—the house was lonely—her uncle had the reputation of being well-to-do—they had pretended to be belated, and had asked their way or something. What a blessing that John Kirkby's cow was sick, for there were several men watching with him! She went back, opened her window, squeezed herself out, slid down the lean-to roof, and ran barefoot and breathless to the shippon—

“John, John, for the love of God, come quick; there's robbers in the house, and uncle and aunt 'll be murdered!” she whispered, in terrified accents, through the closed and barred shippon door. In a moment it was undone, and John and the cow-doctor stood there, ready to act, if they but understood her rightly. Again she repeated her words, with broken, half-unintelligible explanations of what she as yet did not rightly understand.

“Front door is open, say'st thou?” said John, arming

himself with a pitchfork, while the cow-doctor took some other implement. "Then I reckon we'd best make for that way o' getting into th' house, and catch 'em all in a trap."

"Run! run!" was all Bessy could say, taking hold of John Kirkby's arm, and pulling him along with her. Swiftly did the three run to the house round the corner, and in at the open front door. The men carried the horn lantern they had been using in the shippon, and by the sudden oblong light that it threw, Bessy saw the principal object of her anxiety, her uncle, lying stunned and helpless on the kitchen-floor. Her first thought was for him; for she had no idea that her aunt was in any immediate danger, although she heard the noise of feet, and fierce, subdued voices upstairs.

"Make th' door behind us, lass. We'll not let 'em escape!" said brave John Kirkby, dauntless in a good cause, though he knew not how many there might be above. The cow-doctor fastened and locked the door, saying, "There!" in a defiant tone, as he put the key in his pocket. It was to be a struggle for life or death, or, at any rate, for effectual capture or desperate escape. Bessy kneeled down by her uncle, who did not speak nor give any sign of consciousness. Bessy raised his head by drawing a pillow off the settle, and putting it under him; she longed to go for water into the back kitchen, but the sound of a violent struggle, and of heavy blows, and of low, hard curses spoken through closed teeth, and muttered passion, as though breath were too much needed for action to be wasted in speech, kept her still and quiet by her uncle's side in the kitchen, where the darkness might almost be felt, so thick and deep was it. Once—in a pause of her own heart's beating—a sudden terror came over her; she perceived, in that strange way in which the presence of a living creature forces itself on our consciousness in the darkest room, that some one was near her, keeping as still as she. It was not the poor old man's breathing that she heard, nor the radiation of his presence that she felt; some one else was in the kitchen; another robber, perhaps, left to guard the old man, with murderous intent if his consciousness returned. Now Bessy was fully aware that self-preservation would keep her terrible companion quiet, as there was no motive for his betraying

himself stronger than the desire of escape ; any effort for which he, the unseen witness, must know would be rendered abortive by the fact of the door being locked.

Yet with the knowledge that he was there, close to her, still, silent as the grave—with fearful, it might be deadly, unspoken thoughts in his heart—possibly even with keener and stronger sight than hers, as longer accustomed to the darkness, able to discern her figure and posture, and glaring at her like some wild beast—Bessy could not fail to shrink from the vision that her fancy presented ! And still the struggle went on upstairs ; feet slipping, blows sounding, and the wrench of intensioned aims, the strong gasps for breath, as the wrestlers paused for an instant. In one of these pauses, Bessy felt conscious of a creeping movement close to her, which ceased when the noise of the strife above died away, and was resumed when it again began. She was aware of it by some subtle vibration of the air, rather than by touch or sound. She was sure that he who had been close to her one minute as she knelt, was, the next, passing stealthily towards the inner door which led to the staircase. She thought he was going to join and strengthen his accomplices, and, with a great cry, she sprang after him ; but just as she came to the doorway, through which some dim portion of light from the upper chambers came, she saw one man thrown downstairs, with such violence that he fell almost at her very feet, while the dark, creeping figure glided suddenly away to the left, and as suddenly entered the closet beneath the stairs. Bessy had no time to wonder as to his purpose in so doing, whether he had at first designed to aid his accomplices in their desperate fight or not. He was an enemy, a robber, that was all she knew, and she sprang to the door of the closet, and in a trice had locked it on the outside. And then she stood frightened, panting in that dark corner, sick with terror lest the man who lay before her was either John Kirkby or the cow-doctor. If it were either of those friendly two, what would become of the other—of her uncle, her aunt, herself ? But, in a very few minutes, this wonder was ended ; her two defenders came slowly and heavily down the stairs, dragging with them a man, fierce, sullen, despairing—disabled with terrible blows, which had made his face one bloody, swollen mass. As for that, neither John nor the cow-doctor were much more presentable. One of them bore the lantern

in his teeth, for all their strength was taken up by the weight of the fellow they were bearing.

"Take care," said Bessy, from her corner; "there's a chap just beneath your feet. I dunno know if he's dead or alive, and uncle lies on the floor just beyond."

They stood still on the stairs for a moment. Just then the robber they had thrown downstairs stirred and moaned.

"Bessy," said John, "run off to th' stable and fetch ropes and gearing for to bind 'em, and we'll rid the house on 'em, and thou can'st gò see after th' oud folks, who need it sadly."

Bessy was back in a very few minutes. When she came in, there was more light in the house-place, for some one had stirred up the raked fire.

"That felly makes as though his leg were broken," said John, nodding towards the man still lying on the ground. Bessy felt almost sorry for him as they handled him—not over gently—and bound him, only half-conscious, as hardly and tightly as they had done his fierce, surly companion. She even felt so sorry for his evident agony, as they turned him over and over, that she ran to get him a cup of water to moisten his lips.

"I'm loth to leave yo' with him alone," said John, "though I'm thinking his leg is broken for sartain, and he can't stir, even if he comes to hiss, to do yo' any harm. But we'll just take off this chap, and mak sure of him, and then one on us 'll come back to yo', and we can, may be, find a gate or so for yo' to get shut on him out o' th' house. This felly's made safe enough, I'll be bound," said he, looking at the burglar, who stood, bloody and black, with fell hatred on his sullen face. His eye caught Bessy's as hers fell on him with dread so evident that it made him smile, and the look and the smile prevented the words from being spoken which were on Bessy's lips.

She dared not tell, before him, that an able-bodied accomplice still remained in the house, lest, somehow, the door which kept him a prisoner should be broken open and the fight renewed. So she only said to John, as he was leaving the house—

"Thou'll not be long away, for I'm afeared of being left wi' this man."

"He'll noan do thee harm," said John.

"No! but I'm feared lest he should die. And there's uncle and aunt. Come back soon, John!"

"Ay, ay!" said he, half-pleased; "I'll be back, never fear me."

So Bessy shut the door after them, but did not lock it, for fear of mischances in the house, and went once more to her uncle, whose breathing, by this time, was easier than when she had first returned into the house-place with John and the doctor. By the light of the fire, too, she could now see that he had received a blow on the head, which was probably the occasion of his stupor. Round this wound, which was bleeding pretty freely, Bessy put cloths dipped in cold water, and then leaving him for a time, she lighted a candle, and was about to go upstairs to her aunt, when, just as she was passing the bound and disabled robber, she heard her name softly, urgently called—

"Bessy, Bessy!" At first the voice sounded so close that she thought it must be the unconscious wretch at her feet. But once again that voice thrilled through her—

"Bessy, Bessy! for God's sake, let me out!"

She went to the stair-closet door, and tried to speak, but could not, her heart beat so terribly. Again, close to her ear—

"Bessy, Bessy! they'll be back directly; let me out, I say! For God's sake, let me out!" And he began to kick violently against the panels.

"Hush! hush!" she said, sick with a terrible dread, yet with a will strongly resisting her conviction. "Who art you?" But she knew—knew quite well.

"Benjamin." An oath. "Let me out, I say, and I'll be off, and out of England by to-morrow night, never to come back, and you'll have all my father's money."

"D'ye think I care for that?" said Bessy vehemently, feeling with trembling hands for the lock; "I wish there was naan such a thing as money i' the world, afore yo'd come to this. There, yo're free, and I charge yo' never to let me see your face again. I'd ne'er ha' let yo' loose but for fear o' breaking their hearts, if yo' hanna killed him already." But, before she had ended her speech, he was gone—off into the black darkness, leaving the door open

wide. With a new terror in her mind, Bessy shut it afresh—shut it and bolted it this time. Then she sat down on the first chair, and relieved her soul by giving a great and exceeding bitter cry. But she knew it was no time for giving way, and lifting herself up with as much effort as if each of her limbs was a heavy weight, she went into the back kitchen, and took a drink of cold water. To her surprise, she heard her uncle's voice saying feebly—

“Carry me up, and lay me by her.”

But Bessy could not carry him: she could only help his faint exertions to walk upstairs: and by the time he was there, sitting panting on the first chair she could find, John Kirkby and Atkinson returned. John came up now to her aid. Her aunt lay across the bed in a fainting fit, and her uncle sat in so utterly broken-down a state that Bessy feared immediate death for both. But John cheered her up, and lifted the old man into his bed again, and, while Bessy tried to compose poor Hester's limbs into a position of rest, John went down to hunt about for the little store of gin which was always kept in a corner cupboard against emergencies.

“They've had a sore fright,” said he, shaking his head, as he poured a little gin and hot water into their mouths with a tea-spoon, while Bessy chafed their cold feet; “and it and the cold have been welly too much for 'em, poor old folk!”

He looked tenderly at them, and Bessy blessed him in her heart for that look.

“I maun be off. I sent Atkinson up to th' farm for to bring down Bob, and Jack came wi' him back to th' shippon for to look after t'other man. He began blackguarding us all round, so Bob and Jack were gagging him wi' bridles when I left.”

“Ne'er give heed to what he says,” cried poor Bessy, a new panic besetting her. “Folks o' his sort are allays for dragging other folk into their mischief. I'm right glad he were well gagged.”

“Well! but what I were saying were this: Atkinson and me will take t'other chap, who seems quiet enough, to th' shippon, and it'll be one piece o' work for to mind them and the cow; and I'll saddle old bay mare and ride for

constables and doctor fra' Highminster. I'll bring Dr. Preston up to see Nathan and Hester first, and then I reckon th' broken-legged chap down below must have his turn, for all as he's met wi' his misfortunes in a wrong line o' life."

"Ay!" said Bessy. "We maun ha' the doctor sure enough, for look at them how they lie! like two stone statues on a church monument, so sad and solemn."

"There's a look o' sense come back into their faces though, sin' they supped that gin-and-water. I'd keep on a-bathing his head and giving them a sup on't fra' time to time, if I was you, Bessy."

Bessy followed him downstairs, and lighted the men out of the house. She dared not light them carrying their burden even, until they passed round the corner of the house; so strong was her fearful conviction that Benjamin was lurking near, seeking again to enter. She rushed back into the kitchen, bolted and barred the door, and pushed the end of the dresser against it, shutting her eyes as she passed the uncurtained window, for fear of catching a glimpse of a white face pressed against the glass, and gazing at her. The poor old couple lay quiet and speechless, although Hester's position had slightly altered: she had turned a little on her side towards her husband, and had laid one shrivelled arm around his neck. But he was just as Bessy had left him, with the wet cloths around his head, his eyes not wanting in a certain intelligence, but solemn, and unconscious to all that was passing around as the eyes of death.

His wife spoke a little from time to time—said a word of thanks, perhaps, or so; but he, never. All the rest of that terrible night, Bessy tended the poor old couple with constant care, her own heart so stunned and bruised in its feelings that she went about her pious duties almost like one in a dream. The November morning was long in coming; nor did she perceive any change, either for the worse or the better, before the doctor came, about eight o'clock. John Kirkby brought him; and was full of the capture of the two burglars.

As far as Bessy could make out, the participation of that unnatural Third was unknown. It was a relief, almost sickening

in the revulsion it gave her from her terrible fear, which now she felt had haunted and held possession of her all night long, and had, in fact, paralysed her from thinking. Now she felt and thought with acute and feverish vividness, owing, no doubt, in part, to the sleepless night she had passed. She felt almost sure that her uncle (possibly her aunt, too) had recognised Benjamin; but there was a faint chance that they had not done so, and wild horses should never tear the secret from her, nor should any inadvertent word betray the fact that there had been a third person concerned. As to Nathan, he had never uttered a word. It was her aunt's silence that made Bessy fear lest Hester knew, somehow, that her son was concerned.

The doctor examined them both closely; looked hard at the wound on Nathan's head; asked questions which Hester answered shortly and unwillingly, and Nathan not at all: shutting his eyes, as if even the sight of a stranger was pain to him. Bessy replied in their stead to all that she could answer respecting their state; and followed the doctor downstairs with a beating heart. When they came into the house-place, they found John had opened the outer door to let in some fresh air, had brushed the hearth and made up the fire, and put the chairs and table in their right places. He reddened a little as Bessy's eye fell upon his swollen and battered face, but tried to smile it off in a dry kind of way—

“Yo' see, I'm an ould bachelor, and I just thought as I'd redd up things a bit. How dun yo' find 'em, doctor?”

“Well, the poor old couple have had a terrible shock. I shall send them some soothing medicine to bring down the pulse, and a lotion for the old man's head. It is very well it bled so much; there might have been a good deal of inflammation.” And so he went on, giving directions to Bessy for keeping them quietly in bed through the day. From these directions she gathered that they were not, as she had feared all night long, near to death. The doctor expected them to recover, though they would require care. She almost wished it had been otherwise, and that they, and she too, might have just lain down to their rest in the churchyard—so cruel did life seem to her; so dreadful the recollection of that subdued voice of the hidden robber smiting her with recognition.

All this time John was getting things ready for breakfast, with something of the handiness of a woman. Bessy half resented his officiousness in pressing Dr. Preston to have a cup of tea, she did so want him to be gone and leave her alone with her thoughts. She did not know that all was done for love of her; that the hard-featured short-spoken John was thinking all the time how ill and miserable she looked, and trying with tender artifices to make it incumbent upon her sense of hospitality to share Dr. Preston's meal.

"I've seen as the cows is milked," said he, "yourn and all; and Atkinson's brought ours round fine. Whatten a marcy it were as she were sick just this very night! Yon two chaps 'ud ha' made short work on't, if yo' hadna fetched us in; and as it were, we had a sore tussle. One on 'em 'll bear the marks on't to his dying day, wunnot he, doctor?"

"He'll barely have his leg well enough to stand his trial at York Assizes; they're coming off in a fortnight from now."

"Ay, and that reminds me, Bessy, yo'll have to go witness before Justice Royds. Constables bade me tell yo', and gie yo' this summons. Dunnot be feared: it will not be a long job, though I'm not saying as it'll be a pleasant one. Yo'll have to answer questions as to how, and all about it; and Jane" (his sister) "will come and stop wi' th' oud folks; and I'll drive yo' in the shandry."

No one knew why Bessy's colour blenched, and her eye clouded. No one knew how she apprehended lest she should have to say that Benjamin had been of the gang, if, indeed, in some way, the law had not followed on his heels quick enough to catch him.

But that trial was spared her; she was warned by John to answer questions, and say no more than was necessary, for fear of making her story less clear; and as she was known, by character at least, to Justice Royds and his clerk, they made the examination as little formidable as possible.

When all was over, and John was driving her back again, he expressed his rejoicing that there would be evidence enough to convict the men, without summoning Nathan and Hester to identify them. Bessy was so tired that she hardly understood what an escape it was; how far greater than even her companion understood.

Jane Kirkby stayed with her for a week or more, and was an unspeakable comfort. Otherwise she sometimes thought she should have gone mad, with the face of her uncle always reminding her, in its stony expression of agony, of that fearful night. Her aunt was softer in her sorrow, as became one of her faithful and pious nature ; but it was easy to see how her heart bled inwardly. She recovered her strength sooner than her husband ; but as she recovered, the doctor perceived the rapid approach of total blindness. Every day, nay, every hour of the day, that Bessy dared, without fear of exciting their suspicions of her knowledge, she told them, as she had anxiously told them at first, that only two men, and those perfect strangers, had been discovered as being concerned in the burglary. Her uncle would never have asked a question about it, even if she had withheld all information respecting the affair ; but she noticed the quick, watching, waiting glance of his eye, whenever she returned from any person or place where she might have been supposed to gain intelligence if Benjamin were suspected or caught : and she hastened to relieve the old man's anxiety, by always telling all that she had heard ; thankful that as the days passed on the danger she sickened to think of grew less and less.

Day by day, Bessie had ground for thinking that her aunt knew more than she had apprehended at first. There was something so very humble and touching in Hester's blind way of feeling about for her husband—stern, woe-begone Nathan—and mutely striving to console him in the deep agony of which Bessy learnt, from this loving, piteous manner, that her aunt was conscious. Her aunt's face looked blankly up into his, tears slowly running down from her sightless eyes ; while from time to time, when she thought herself unheard by any save him, she would repeat such texts as she had heard at church in happier days, and which she thought, in her true, simple piety, might tend to console him. Yet, day by day, her aunt grew more and more sad.

Three or four days before assize-time, two summonses to attend the trial at York were sent to the old people. Neither Bessy, nor John, nor Jane, could understand this : for their own notices had come long before, and they had been told that their evidence would be enough to convict.

But, alas! the fact was, that the lawyer employed to defend the prisoners had heard from them that there was a third person engaged, and had heard who that third person was; and it was this advocate's business to diminish, if possible, the guilt of his clients, by proving that they were but tools in the hands of one who had, from his superior knowledge of the premises and the daily customs of the inhabitants, been the originator and planner of the whole affair. To do this it was necessary to have the evidence of the parents, who, as the prisoners had said, must have recognised the voice of the young man, their son. For no one knew that Bessy, too, could have borne witness to his having been present; and, as it was supposed that Benjamin had escaped out of England, there was no exact betrayal of him on the part of his accomplices.

Wondering, bewildered, and weary, the old couple reached York, in company with John and Bessy, on the eve of the day of trial. Nathan was still so self-contained, that Bessy could never guess what had been passing in his mind. He was almost passive under his old wife's trembling caresses; he seemed hardly conscious of them, so rigid was his demeanour.

She, Bessy feared at times, was becoming childish; for she had evidently so great and anxious a love for her husband, that her memory seemed going in her endeavours to melt the stoniness of his aspect and manners; she appeared occasionally to have forgotten why he was so changed, in her piteous little attempts to bring him back to his former self.

"They'll, for sure, never torture them when they see what old folks they are!" cried Bessy, on the morning of the trial, a dim fear looming over her mind. "They'll never be so cruel, for sure?"

But "for sure" it was so. The barrister looked up at the judge, almost apologetically, as he saw how hoary-headed and woeful an old man was put into the witness-box, when the defence came on, and Nathan Huntroyd was called on for his evidence.

"It is necessary, on behalf of my clients, my lord, that I should pursue a course which, for all other reasons, I deplore."

"Go on!" said the judge. "What is right and legal must

be done." But, an old man himself, he covered his quivering mouth with his hand as Nathan, with grey, unmoved face, and solemn, hollow eyes, placing his two hands on each side of the witness-box, prepared to give his answers to questions, the nature of which he was beginning to foresee, but would not shrink from replying to truthfully; "the very stones" (as he said to himself, with a kind of dulled sense of the Eternal Justice) "rise up against such a sinner."

"Your name is Nathan Huntroyd, I believe?"

"It is."

"You live at Nab-End Farm?"

"I do."

"Do you remember the night of November the twelfth?"

"Yes."

"You were awakened that night by some noise, I believe. What was it?"

The old man's eyes fixed themselves upon his questioner with the look of a creature brought to bay. That look the barrister never forgets. It will haunt him till his dying day.

"It was a throwing up of stones against our window."

"Did you hear it at first?"

"No."

"What awakened you, then?"

"She did."

"And then you both heard the stones. Did you hear nothing else?"

A long pause. Then a low, clear "Yes."

"What?"

"Our Benjamin asking us for to let him in. She said as it were him, leastways."

"And you thought it was him, did you not?"

"I told her" (this time in a louder voice) "for to get to sleep, and not be thinking that every drunken chap as passed by were our Benjamin, for that he were dead and gone."

"And she?"

"She said as though she'd heerd our Benjamin, afore she were welly awake, axing for to be let in. But I bade her ne'er heed her dreams, but turn on her other side and get to sleep again."

"And did she?"

A long pause—judge, jury, bar, audience, all held their breath. At length Nathan said—

"No!"

"What did you do then? (My lord, I am compelled to ask these painful questions.)"

"I saw she wadna be quiet: she had allays thought he would come back to us, like the Prodigal i' th' Gospels." (His voice choked a little, but he tried to make it steady, succeeded, and went on.) "She said, if I wadna get up she would; and just then I heerd a voice. I'm not quite mysel, gentlemen—I've been ill and i' bed, an' it makes me trembling-like. Some one said, 'Father, mother, I'm here, starving i' the cold—wunnot yo' get up and let me in?'"

"And that voice was——?"

"It were like our Benjamin's. I see whatten yo're driving at, sir, and I'll tell yo' truth, though it kills me to speak it. I dunnot say it were our Benjamin as spoke, mind yo'—I only say it were like"——

"That's all I want, my good fellow. And on the strength of that entreaty, spoken in your son's voice, you went down and opened the door to these two prisoners at the bar, and to a third man?"

Nathan nodded assent, and even that counsel was too merciful to force him to put more into words.

"Call Hester Huntroyd."

An old woman, with a face of which the eyes were evidently blind, with a sweet, gentle, careworn face, came into the witness-box, and meekly curtsied to the presence of those whom she had been taught to respect—a presence she could not see.

There was something in her humble, blind aspect, as she stood waiting to have something done to her—what her poor troubled mind hardly knew—that touched all who saw her, inexpressibly. Again the counsel apologised, but the judge could not reply in words; his face was quivering all over, and the jury looked uneasily at the prisoners' counsel. That gentleman saw that he might go too far, and send their sympathies off on the other side; but one or two questions he must ask. So, hastily recapitulating much that he had learned from Nathan,

he said, "You believed it was your son's voice asking to be let in?"

"Ay! Our Benjamin came home, I'm sure; choose where he is gone."

She turned her head about, as if listening for the voice of her child, in the hushed silence of the court.

"Yes; he came home that night—and your husband went down to let him in?"

"Well! I believe he did. There was a great noise of folk downstairs."

"And you heard your son Benjamin's voice among the others?"

"Is it to do him harm, sir?" asked she, her face growing more intelligent and intent on the business in hand.

"That is not my object in questioning you. I believe he has left England, so nothing you can say will do him any harm. You heard your son's voice, I say?"

"Yes, sir. For sure I did."

"And some men came upstairs into your room? What did they say?"

"They axed where Nathan kept his stocking."

"And you—did you tell them?"

"No, sir, for I knew Nathan would not like me to."

"What did you do then?"

A shade of reluctance came over her face, as if she began to perceive causes and consequences.

"I just screamed on Bessy—that's my niece, sir."

"And you heard some one shout out from the bottom of the stairs?"

She looked piteously at him, but did not answer.

"Gentlemen of the jury, I wish to call your particular attention to this fact: she acknowledges she heard some one shout—some third person, you observe—shout out to the two above. What did he say? That is the last question I shall trouble you with. What did the third person, left behind, downstairs, say?"

Her face worked—her mouth opened two or three times as if to speak—she stretched out her arms imploringly; but no word came, and she fell back into the arms of those nearest to her. Nathan forced himself forward into the witness-box—

“ My Lord Judge, a woman bore yc, as I reckon ; it's a cruel shame to serve a mother so. It wur my son, my only child, as called out for us t' open door, and who shouted out for to hold th' oud woman's throat if she did na stop her noise, when hoo'd fain ha' cried for her niece to help. And now yo've truth, and a' th' truth, and I'll leave yo' to th' judgment o' God for th' way yo've gotten at it.”

Before night the mother was stricken with paralysis, and lay on her death-bed. But the broken-hearted go Home, to be comforted of God.



THE SEXTON'S HERO.



THE afternoon sun shed down his glorious rays on the grassy churchyard, making the shadow, cast by the old yew-tree under which we sat, seem deeper and deeper by contrast. The everlasting hum of myriads of summer insects made luxurious lullaby.

Of the view that lay beneath our gaze, I cannot speak adequately. The foreground was the grey-stone wall of the vicarage garden; rich in the colouring made by innumerable lichens, ferns, ivy of most tender green and most delicate tracery, and the vivid scarlet of the crane's-bill, which found a home in every nook and crevice—and at the summit of that old wall flaunted some unpruned tendrils of the vine, and long flower-laden branches of the climbing rose-tree, trained against the inner side. Beyond, lay meadow green and mountain grey, and the blue dazzle of Morecambe Bay, as it sparkled between us and the more distant view.

For a while we were silent, living in sight and murmuring sound. Then Jeremy took up our conversation where, suddenly feeling weariness, as we saw that deep green shadowy resting-place, we had ceased speaking a quarter of an hour before.

It is one of the luxuries of holiday-time that thoughts are not rudely shaken from us by outward violence of hurry and busy impatience, but fall maturely from our lips in the sunny leisure of our days. The stock may be bad, but the fruit is ripe.

“How would you then define a hero?” I asked.

There was a long pause, and I had almost forgotten my question in watching a cloud-shadow floating over the far-away hills, when Jeremy made answer—

"My idea of a hero is one who acts up to the highest idea of duty he has been able to form, no matter at what sacrifice. I think that by this definition, we may include all phases of character, even to the heroes of old, whose sole (and to us, low) idea of duty consisted in personal prowess."

"Then you would even admit the military heroes?" asked I.

"I would ; with a certain kind of pity for the circumstances which had given them no higher ideas of duty. Still, if they sacrificed self to do what they sincerely believed to be right, I do not think I could deny them the title of hero."

"A poor, unchristian heroism, whose manifestation consists in injury to others !" I said.

We were both startled by a third voice.

"If I might make so bold, sir"—and then the speaker stopped.

It was the Sexton, whom, when we first arrived, we had noticed, as an accessory to the scene, but whom we had forgotten, as much as though he were as inanimate as one of the moss-covered headstones.

"If I might be so bold," said he again, waiting leave to speak. Jeremy bowed in deference to his white, uncovered head. And so encouraged, he went on.

"What that gentleman" (alluding to my last speech) "has just now said, brings to my mind one who is dead and gone this many a year ago. I, may be, have not rightly understood your meaning, gentlemen, but as far as I could gather it, I think you'd both have given in to thinking poor Gilbert Dawson a hero. At any rate," said he, heaving a long, quivering sigh, "I have reason to think him so."

"Will you take a seat, sir, and tell us about him?" said Jeremy, standing up until the old man was seated. I confess I felt impatient at the interruption.

"It will be forty-five year come Martinmas," said the Sexton, sitting down on a grassy mound at our feet, "since I finished my 'prenticeship, and settled down at Lindal. You can see Lindal, sir, at evenings and mornings across the bay ; a little to the right of Grange ; at least, I used to see it, many a time and oft, afore my sight grew so dark : and I have spent many a quarter of an hour a-gazing at it far away, and thinking of the days I lived there, till the tears came so thick to my eyes, I could gaze no longer. I shall never look upon it again, either

far-off or near, but you may see it, both ways, and a terrible bonny spot it is. In my young days, when I went to settle there, it was full of as wild a set of young fellows as ever were clapped eyes on; all for fighting, poaching, quarrelling, and such-like work. I were startled myself when I first found what a set I were among, but soon I began to fall into their ways, and I ended by being as rough a chap as any on 'em. I'd been there a matter of two year, and were reckoned by most the cock of the village, when Gilbert Dawson, as I was speaking of, came to Lindal. He were about as strapping a chap as I was (I used to be six feet high, though now I'm so shrunk and doubled up), and, as we were like in the same trade (both used to prepare osiers and wood for the Liverpool coopers, who get a deal of stuff from the copses round the bay, sir), we were thrown together, and took mightily to each other. I put my best leg foremost to be equal with Gilbert, for I'd had some schooling, though since I'd been at Lindal I'd lost a good part of what I'd learnt; and I kept my rough ways out of sight for a time, I felt so ashamed of his getting to know them. But that did not last long. I began to think he fancied a girl I dearly loved, but who had always held off from me. Eh! but she was a pretty one in those days! There's none like her, now. I think I see her going along the road with her dancing tread, and shaking back her long yellow curls, to give me or any other young fellow a saucy word; no wonder Gilbert was taken with her, for all he was grave, and she so merry and light. But I began to think she liked him again; and then my blood was all afire. I got to hate him for everything he did. Aforetime I had stood by, admiring to see him, how he leapt, and what a quoter and cricketer he was. And now I ground my teeth with hatred whene'er he did a thing which caught Letty's eye. I could read it in her look that she liked him, for all she held herself just as high with him as with all the rest. Lord God forgive me! how I hated that man."

He spoke as if the hatred were a thing of yesterday, so clear within his memory were shown the actions and feelings of his youth. And then he dropped his voice, and said—

"Well! I began to look out to pick a quarrel with him, for my blood was up to fight him. If I beat him (and I were a rare boxer in those days), I thought Letty would cool towards

him. So one evening at quoits (I'm sure I don't know how or why, but large doings grow out of small words) I fell out with him; and challenged him to fight. I could see he were very wroth by his colour coming and going—and, as I said before, he were a fine active young fellow. But all at once he drew in, and said he would not fight. Such a yell as the Lindal lads, who were watching us, set up! I hear it yet. I could na' help but feel sorry for him, to be so scorned, and I thought he'd not rightly taken my meaning, and I'd give him another chance; so I said it again, and dared him, as plain as words could speak, to fight out the quarrel. He told me then, he had no quarrel against me; that he might have said something to put me up; he did not know that he had, but that if he had, he asked pardon; but that he would not fight no-how.

"I was so full of scorn at his cowardliness, that I was vexed I'd given him the second chance, and I joined in the yell that was set up, twice as bad as before. He stood it out, his teeth set, and looking very white, and when we were silent for want of breath, he said out loud, but in a hoarse voice, quite different from his own—

"'I cannot fight, because I think it is wrong to quarrel, and use violence.'

"Then he turned to go away; I were so beside myself with scorn and hate, that I called out—

"'Tell truth, lad, at least; if thou dare not fight, dunnot go and tell a lie about it. Mother's moppet is afraid of a black eye, pretty dear. It shannot be hurt, but it munnot tell lies.'

"Well, they laughed, but I could not laugh. It seemed such a thing for a stout young chap to be a coward and afraid!

"Before the sun had set, it was talked of all over Lindal, how I had challenged Gilbert to fight, and how he'd denied me; and the folks stood at their doors, and looked at him going up the hill to his home, as if he'd been a monkey or a foreigner—but no one wished him good e'en. Such a thing as refusing to fight had never been heard of afore at Lindal. Next day, however, they had found voice. The men muttered the word 'coward' in his hearing, and kept aloof; the women tittered as he passed, and the little impudent lads and lasses

shouted out, 'How long is it sin' thou turned Quaker?' 'Good-bye, Jonathan Broad-brim,' and such-like jests:

"That evening I met him, with Letty by his side, coming up from the shore. She was almost crying as I came upon them at the turn of the lane; and looking up in his face, as if begging him something. And so she was, she told me it after. For she did really like him; and could not abide to hear him scorned by every one for being a coward; and she, coy as she was, all but told him that very night that she loved him, and begged him not to disgrace himself, but fight me as I'd dared him to. When he still stuck to it he could not, for that it was wrong, she was so vexed and mad-like at the way she'd spoken, and the feelings she'd let out to coax him, that she said more stinging things about his being a coward than all the rest put together (according to what she told me, sir, afterwards), and ended by saying she'd never speak to him again, as long as she lived; she did once again, though—her blessing was the last human speech that reached his ear in his wild death-struggle.

"But much happened afore that time. From the day I met them walking, Letty turned towards me; I could see a part of it was to spite Gilbert, for she'd be twice as kind when he was near, or likely to hear of it; but by-and-by she got to like me for my own sake, and it was all settled for our marriage. Gilbert kept aloof from every one, and fell into a sad, careless way. His very gait was changed; his step used to be brisk and sounding, and now his foot lingered heavily on the ground. I used to try and daunt him with my eye, but he would always meet my look in a steady, quiet way, for all so much about him was altered; the lads would not play with him; and as soon as he found he was to be slighted by them whenever he came to quoiting or cricket, he just left off coming.

"The old clerk was the only one he kept company with; or perhaps, rightly to speak, the only one who would keep company with him. They got so thick at last, that old Jonas would say, Gilbert had gospel on his side, and did no more than gospel told him to do; but we none of us gave much credit to what he said, more by token our vicar had a brother, a colonel in the army; and as we threeped it many a time to Jonas, would he set himself up to know the gospel better than the vicar? that would be putting the cart afore the horse, like

the French radicals. And if the vicar had thought quarrelling and fighting wicked, and again the Bible, would he have made so much work about all the victories, that were as plenty as blackberries at that time of day, and kept the little bell of Lindal church for ever ringing; or would he have thought so much of 'my brother the colonel,' as he was always talking on?

"After I was married to Letty I left off hating Gilbert. I even kind of pitied him—he was so scorned and slighted; and for all he'd a bold look about him, as if he were not ashamed, he seemed pining and shrunk. It's a wearying thing to be kept at arm's length by one's kind; and so Gilbert found it, poor fellow. The little children took to him, though; they'd be round about him like a swarm of bees—them as was too young to know what a coward was, and only felt that he was ever ready to love and to help them, and was never loud or cross, however naughty they might be. After a while we had our little one, too; such a blessed darling she was, and dearly did we love her; Letty in especial, who seemed to get all the thought I used to think sometimes she wanted, after she had her baby to care for.

"All my kin lived on this side the bay, up above Kellet. Jane (that's her that lies buried near yon white rose-tree) was to be married, and nought would serve her but that Letty and I must come to the wedding; for all my sisters loved Letty, she had such winning ways with her. Letty did not like to leave her baby, nor yet did I want her to take it: so, after a talk, we fixed to leave it with Letty's mother for the afternoon. I could see her heart ached a bit, for she'd never left it till then, and she seemed to fear all manner of evil, even to the French coming and taking it away. Well! we borrowed a shandry, and harnessed my old grey mare, as I used in th' cart, and set off as grand as King George across the sands about three o'clock, for you see it were high-water about twelve, and we'd to go and come back same tide, as Letty could not leave her baby for long. It were a merry afternoon were that; last time I ever saw Letty laugh heartily; and, for that matter, last time I ever laughed downright hearty myself. The latest crossing-time fell about nine o'clock, and we were late at starting. Clocks were wrong; and we'd a piece of work chasing a pig father had given Letty to take home; we bagged him at last, and he screeched and screeched in the back part o'

th' shandry, and we laughed and they laughed; and in the midst of all the merriment the sun set, and that sobered us a bit, for then we knew what time it was. I whipped the old mare, but she was a deal beener than she was in the morning, and would neither go quick up nor down the brows, and they're not a few 'twixt Kellet and the shore. On the sands it were worse. They were very heavy, for the fresh had come down after the rains we'd had. Lord! how I did whip the poor mare, to make the most of the red light as yet lasted. You, may be, don't know the sands, gentlemen. From Bolton side, where we started from, it is better than six mile to Cart Lane, and two channels to cross, let alone holes and quicksands. At the second channel from us the guide waits, all during crossing-time from sunrise to sunset; but for the three hours on each side high-water he's not there, in course. He stays after sunset if he's forespoken, not else. So now you know where we were that awful night. For we'd crossed the first channel about two mile, and it were growing darker and darker above and around us, all but one red line of light above the hills, when we came to a hollow (for all the sands look so flat, there's many a hollow in them where you lose all sight of the shore). We were longer than we should ha' been in crossing the hollow, the sand was so quick; and when we came up again, there, again the blackness, was the white line of the rushing tide coming up the bay! It looked not a mile from us; and when the wind blows up the bay it comes swifter than a galloping horse. 'Lord help us!' said I; and then I were sorry I'd spoken, to frighten Letty; but the words were crushed out of my heart by the terror. I felt her shiver up by my side, and clutch my coat. And as if the pig (as had screeched himself hoarse some time ago) had found out the danger we were all in, he took to squealing again, enough to bewilder any man. I cursed him between my teeth for his noise; and yet it was God's answer to my prayer, blind sinner as I was. Ay! you may smile, sir, but God can work through many a scornful thing, if need be.

"By this time the mare was all in a lather, and trembling and panting, as if in mortal fright; for though we were on the last bank afore the second channel, the water was gathering up her legs; and she so tired out! When we came close to the channel she stood still, and not all my

flogging could get her to stir; she fairly groaned aloud, and shook in a terrible quaking way. Till now Letty had not spoken: only held my coat tightly. I heard her say something, and bent down my head.

“‘I think, John—I think—I shall never see baby again!’

“And then she sent up such a cry—so loud, and shrill, and pitiful! It fairly maddened me. I pulled out my knife to spur on the old mare, that it might end one way or the other, for the water was stealing sullenly up to the very axle-tree, let alone the white waves that knew no mercy in their steady advance. That one quarter of an hour, sir, seemed as long as all my life since. Thoughts and fancies, and dreams, and memory ran into each other. The mist, the heavy mist, that was like a ghastly curtain, shutting us in for death, seemed to bring with it the scents of the flowers that grew around our own threshold; it might be, for it was falling on them like blessed dew, though to us it was a shroud. Letty told me at after, she heard her baby crying for her, above the gurgling of the rising waters, as plain as ever she heard anything; but the sea-birds were skirling, and the pig shrieking; I never caught it; it was miles away, at any rate.

“Just as I'd gotten my knife out, another sound was close upon us, blending with the gurgle of the near waters, and the roar of the distant (not so distant though); we could hardly see, but we thought we saw something black against the deep lead colour of wave, and mist, and sky. It neared and neared: with slow, steady motion, it came across the channel right to where we were.

“Oh, God! it was Gilbert Dawson on his strong bay horse.

“Few words did we speak, and little time had we to say them in. I had no knowledge at that moment of past or future—only of one present thought—how to save Letty, and, if I could, myself. I only remembered afterwards that Gilbert said he had been guided by an animal's shriek of terror; I only heard, when all was over, that he had been uneasy about our return, because of the depth of fresh, and had borrowed a pillion, and saddled his horse early in the evening, and ridden down to Cart Lane to watch for us. If all had gone well, we should ne'er have heard of it. As

it was, old Jonas told it, the tears down-dropping from his withered cheeks.

"We fastened his horse to the shandry. We lifted Letty to the pillion. The waters rose every instant with sullen sound. They were all but in the shandry. Letty clung to the pillion handles, but drooped her head as if she had yet no hope of life. Swifter than thought (and yet he might have had time for thought and for temptation, sir—if he had ridden off with Letty, he would have been saved, not me), Gilbert was in the shandry by my side.

"'Quick!' said he, clear and firm. 'You must ride before her, and keep her up. The horse can swim. By God's mercy I will follow. I can cut the traces, and if the mare is not hampered with the shandry, she'll carry me safely through. At any rate, you are a husband and a father. No one cares for me.'

"Do not hate me, gentlemen. I often wish that night was a dream. It has haunted my sleep ever since like a dream, and yet it was no dream. I took his place on the saddle, and put Letty's arms around me, and felt her head rest on my shoulder. I trust in God I spoke some word of thanks; but I can't remember. I only recollect Letty raising her head, and calling out—

"'God bless you, Gilbert Dawson, for saving my baby from being an orphan this night.' And then she fell against me, as if unconscious.

"I bore her through; or, rather, the strong horse swam bravely through the gathering waves. We were dripping wet when we reached the banks in-shore; but we could have but one thought—where was Gilbert? Thick mists and heaving waters compassed us round. Where was he? We shouted. Letty, faint as she was, raised her voice and shouted clear and shrill. No answer came, the sea boomed on with ceaseless sullen beat. I rode to the guide's house. He was a-bed, and would not get up, though I offered him more than I was worth. Perhaps he knew it, the cursed old villain! At any rate, I'd have paid it if I'd toiled my life long. He said I might take his horn and welcome. I did, and blew such a blast through the still, black night, the echoes came back upon the heavy air: but no human voice or sound was heard—that wild blast could not awaken the dead!

"I took Letty home to her baby, over whom she wept the livelong night. I rode back to the shore about Cart Lane; and to and fro, with weary march, did I pace along the brink of the waters, now and then shouting out into the silence a vain cry for Gilbert. The waters went back and left no trace. Two days afterwards he was washed ashore near Flukeborough. The shandry and poor old mare were found half-buried in a heap of sand by Arnside Knot. As far as we could guess, he had dropped his knife while trying to cut the traces, and so had lost all chance of life. Any rate, the knife was found in a cleft of the shaft.

"His friends came over from Garstang to his funeral. I wanted to go chief mourner, but it was not my right, and I might not; though I've never done mourning him to this day. When his sister packed up his things, I begged hard for something that had been his. She would give me none of his clothes (she was a right-down saving woman), as she had boys of her own, who might grow up into them. But she threw me his Bible, as she said they'd gotten one already, and his were but a poor used-up thing. It was his, and so I cared for it. It were a black leather one, with pockets at the sides, old-fashioned-wise; and in one were a bunch of wild flowers, Letty said she could almost be sure were some she had once given him.

"There were many a text in the Gospel, marked broad with his carpenter's pencil, which more than bore him out in his refusal to fight. Of a surety, sir, there's call enough for bravery in the service of God, and to show love to man, without quarrelling and fighting.

"Thank you, gentlemen, for listening to me. Your words called up the thoughts of him, and my heart was full to speaking. But I must make up; I've to dig a grave for a little child, who is to be buried to-morrow morning, just when his play-mates are trooping off to school."

"But tell us of Letty; is she yet alive?" asked Jeremy.

The old man shook his head, and struggled against a choking sigh. After a minute's pause he said—

"She died in less than two year at after that night. She was never like the same again. She would sit thinking, on Gilbert, I guessed: but I could not blame her. We had a boy, and we named it Gilbert Dawson Knipe; he that's

stoker on the London railway. Our girl was carried off in teething; and Letty just quietly drooped, and died in less than a six week. They were buried here; so I came to be near them, and away from Lindal, a place I could never abide after Letty was gone."

He turned to his work, and we, having rested sufficiently, rose up, and came away.

THE END.



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